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MAY 1958

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By
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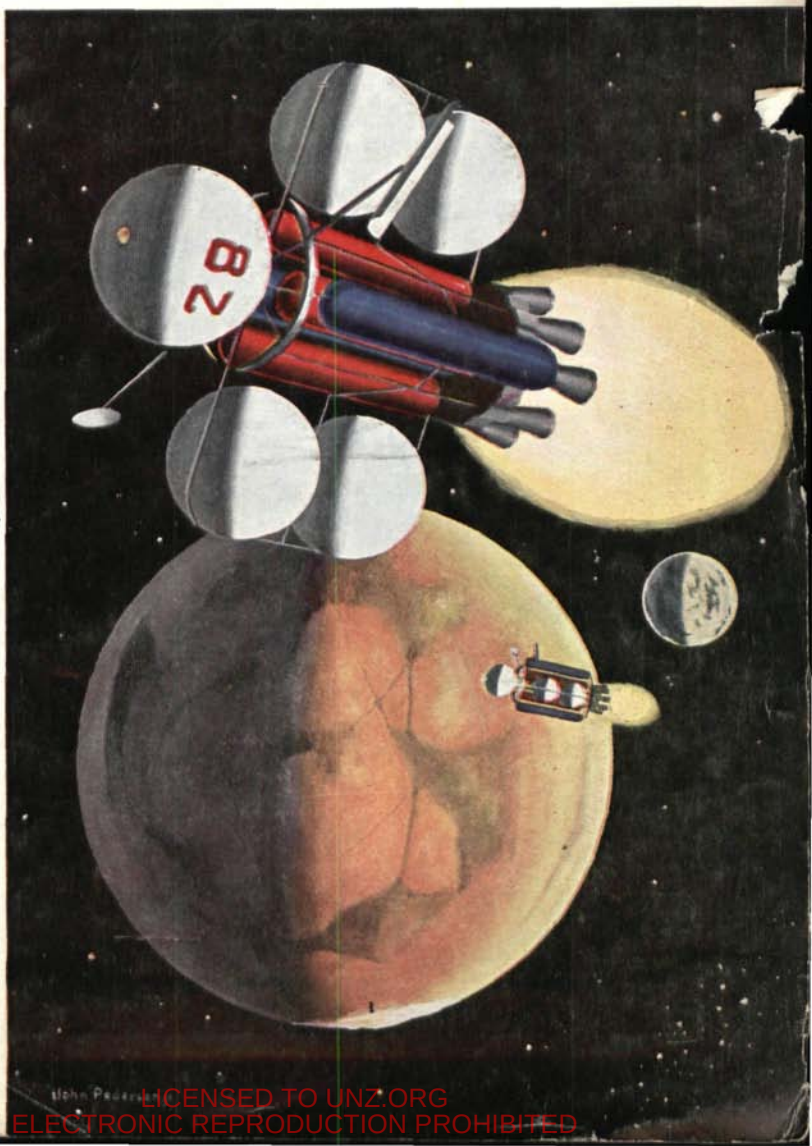

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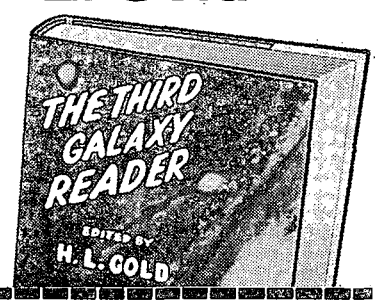

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Galaxy SCIENCE FICTION

MAY, 1958
VOL 16, NO. 1

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Cover by PEDERSON Showing Interplanetary vessels approaching Mars. Because they are assembled at the space station above Earth, and have only the highly rarefied Martian atmosphere to contend with, they need not be srteamlined; thin-hulled auxiliary fuel tanks are clustered outside the ships. Orbiting in, they are using their rocket blasts as brakes, will circle the red planet for days before reducing to landing speed. Deimos in background (apparent size exaggerated by nearness to ships); Phobos, on opposite side of planet, is not visible in picture.

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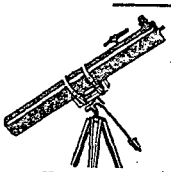

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FUN 4 1 & ALL

ON page 258 of *The Family Book of Humor*, edited by Helen Hoke and published by Hanover House, is an item called "Look Now"—two GALAXY editorials combined into one alarmingly funny article. You probably read it here, so I'm only incidentally pointing with pride. What I really want to do is exhibit some samples from this rich godown you might otherwise not get around to exploring.

"Doctor Doll" by Inez Robb unwraps a porcelain patient with removable viscera: "Once the tiny tykes have scrubbed up and sterilized their hands and instruments, they put this doll or cadaver on the operating table, administer an anaesthetic and open up the torso by removing laces that look like sutures.

"One peek inside the yawning cavity gives the in-training Florence Nightingale a lovely look at the small and large intestines, liver, heart, kidneys, appendix, stomach and lungs, but not necessarily in that order . . .

"Dolly's vital organs are made of plastic and are suspended on pegs for easy removal and return. Squeamish as I am, I must confess that this is an improvement over the original model, and Nature could do worse than take note . . . "

"The Flea Position" by John Crosby reveals that Billy Rayner, British flea impresario, advertised unsuccessfully for 12 fleas and gave this glum interview to the *Daily Telegraph*:

"Since the war the flea position has been getting steadily worse. I blame the vacuum cleaners and these newfangled disinfectants. The average flea lives only for about three months, and they do not breed in captivity. Toward the end of three months they become stiff-jointed, just like humans in their old age. And then they cannot ride the cycles, pull chariots or do sword fighting. All the old fleas can manage is an occasional dance. The public won't pay to see that. It is just what they expect from fleas, anyway."

Mr. Rayner then offers a springboard for an extrapolation that has unaccountably been overlooked by science fiction writers: "We usually find that the more educated people are, the more interest they take in our fleas. At Oxford we bring the house down."

Cartoon on page 127, doctor informing patient: "Your allergy tests suggest that you may have

(Continued on page 144)

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NEVER COME MIDNIGHT

by CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

Across the void came a man who could not ever have been born — from a world that could never have been conceived — to demand his birthright of an Earth that would have to die to pay it!

Illustrated by DILLON

I

JAN SHORTMIRE smiled. "You didn't know I had a son, did you, Peter? Well, neither did I—until quite recently."

"I see." However, Peter Hubbard knew that Jan Shortmire had never married in all of his hundred and fifty-five years. In that day and age, unmarried people did not have children; science, the law, and public sophistication had combined to make the historical "accident" almost impossible. Yet, if some woman of one of the more innocent planets had deliberately conceived in order to trap Shortmire, surely he would have learned of his son's existence long before.

"I'm glad it turns out that I have an heir," Shortmire went on. "Otherwise, the government might get its fists on what little I have—and it's taken enough from me."

Although the old man's estate was a considerable one, it did seem meager in terms of the money he must have made. What *had* become of the golden tide that had

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poured in upon the golden youth, Hubbard wondered. Could anyone have squandered such prodigious sums upon the usual mundane dissipations? For, by the time the esoteric pleasures of the other planets had reached Earth — the byproduct of Shortmire's own achievement — he must have already been too old to enjoy them.

At Hubbard's continued silence, Shortmire said defensively, "If they'd let me sell my patents to private industry, as Dyall was able to do, I'd be leaving a *real* fortune!" His voice grew thick with anger. "When I think how much money Dyall made from those factory machines of his . . . "

But when you added the priceless extra fifty years of life to the money Shortmire had made, it seemed to Hubbard that Shortmire had been amply rewarded. Although, of course, he had heard that Nicholas Dyall had been given the same reward. No point telling Shortmire, if he did not know already. Hubbard could never understand why Shortmire hated Dyall so; it could not be merely the money—and as for reputation, he had a shade the advantage.

"That *toymaker!*" Shortmire spat.

HUBBARD tactfully changed the subject. "What's your boy like, Jan?" But of course Jan Shortmire's son could hardly be a boy; in fact, he was probably almost as old as Hubbard was.

Such old age as Shortmire's was almost incredible. Sitting there in the antique splendor of Hubbard's office, he looked like a splendid antique himself. Who could imagine that passion had ever convulsed that thin white face, that those frail white fingers had ever curved in love and in hate? Age beyond the reach of most men had blanched this once-passionate man to a chill, ivory shadow.

For once, Hubbard felt glad — almost — that he himself was ineligible for the longevity treatment. The alloted five score and ten was enough for any except the very selfish—or selfless—man.

But Shortmire was answering his question. "I have no idea what the boy is like; I've never seen him." Then he added, "I suppose you've been wondering why I finally decided to make a will?"

"A lawyer never wonders when people *do* make wills, Jan," Hubbard said mildly. "He wonders when they *don't*."

"I'm going on a trip to Morethis. Only one of the colonized planets I've never visited." Shortmire's smile did not reach his amber-hard eyes. "Civilized planets, I should have said. It isn't official government policy to colonize planets that have intelligent native lifeforms."

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Not even the most besotted idealist could ever have described Jan Shortmire as altruistic. And for him to be concerned about Morethis, of all planets—Morethis, where the indigenous life-forms were such as to justify a ruthless colonization policy . . . it was outrageous! True, the terrestrial government had been more generous toward the Morethans than toward any of the seven other intelligent life-forms they had found. But this tolerance was based wholly on fear — fear of these remnants of an old, old civilization, eking out their existence around a dying star, yet with terrible glories to remember in their twilight—and traces of these glories to protect them.

How was it that Shortmire, who had been everywhere, seen everything, had never been to Morethis? Hubbard looked keenly at his client. "What *is* all this, Jan?"

The old man shrugged. "Merely that the Foreign Office has suggested it would be wise for travelers to make a will before going there. Being a dutiful citizen of Earth, I comply." He smiled balefully.

"The Foreign Office has suggested that it would be wiser not to go at all," Hubbard said. "There are people who say Morethis ought to be fumigated completely."

"Ah, but it has rare and precious metals on which our industries depend. There are herbs which have multiplied the miracles of modern medicine, jewels and furs unmatched anywhere. We need the native miners and farmers and trappers to get these things for us."

"We could get them for ourselves. We do on the other planets."

Shortmire grinned. "On Morethis, somehow, our people can't seem to find these things themselves. Or, if they do, we can't find our people afterward. Which is why there is peace and friendship between Morethis and Earth."

"*Friendship!* Everyone knows the Morethans hate terrestrials. They tolerate us only because we're stronger!"

"Stronger physically." Shortmire's smile was fading. "Even technology is a kind of physical strength."

NEW apprehension took shape in Hubbard. "You're not going metaphysical in your old age, are you, Jan? And even if you are," he said quickly, while he was still innocent of knowledge, hence could not be consciously offending the other man's beliefs, "what a cult to choose! Blood, terror and torture!"

Shortmire grinned again. "You've been watching vidicasts, Peter. They've laid it on so thick, I'll probably find Morethis deadly dull rather than just . . . deadly."

Certainly, all Hubbard knew of

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Morethis was based on hearsay evidence, but this was not a court of law. "Jan you're a fool! A third of the terrestrials who go to Morethis never come back, and mostly they're young men, strong men."

"Then they're the fools." Shortmire's voice was low and tired. "Because they're risking a whole lifetime, whereas all I'll be risking is a few years of a very boring existence."

Hubbard said no more. Even though the law still did not condone it, a man had the right to dispose of his own life as he saw fit.

Shortmire stood up. Barely stooped by age, he looked, with his great height and extreme emaciation, almost like a fasting saint — a ludicrous simile. "My wine palate is gone, Peter," he said, clapping the younger old man's shoulder, "women and I seem to have lost our mutual attraction, and I never did have much of a singing voice. At least this is one experience I'm not too old to savor."

"Death, do you mean?" Hubbard asked bluntly. "Or Morethis?"

Shortmire smiled. "Perhaps both."

So Peter Hubbard was not surprised when, a few months later, he got word that Jan Shortmire had died on Morethis. The surprising thing was the extraordinarily prosaic manner of his death: he had simply fallen into a river and drowned. No traveler on Morethis had been known to die by undisputed accident before; as a result, the vidicasts devoted more attention to the event than they might have otherwise. But the news died down, as other news took its place. In so large a universe, something was always happening; the dog days were forever gone from journalism.

Going through the old man's papers in his capacity as executor, Hubbard came across an old passport. He was startled to discover that this trip had not been Shortmire's first to Morethis. Why had he lied about it? But that was a question that no one alive could answer — or so Hubbard thought.

Almost two years went by before the will was finally probated on all the planets where Shortmire had owned property. Then the search for Emrys Shortmire began. Messages were dispatched to all the civilized planets, and Peter Hubbard settled back for a long wait.

FIVE years after Jan Shortmire's death, the intercom on Peter Hubbard's desk buzzed and his secretary's voice — his was one of the few legal offices wealthy enough to afford human help — said, "Mr. Emrys Shortmire to see you, sir."

How could a man come from so many light-years' distance without

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radioing on ahead, or at least telecalling from his hotel? Dignity demanded that Hubbard tell his secretary to inform Shortmire that he never saw anyone without an appointment. Curiosity won. "Ask him to come in," he said.

The door slid open. Hubbard started to rise, with the old-fashioned courtesy of a family lawyer. But he never made it. He sat, frozen with shock, staring at the man in the doorway. Because Emrys Shortmire wasn't a man; he was a boy. He might have been a stripling of thirty, except for his eyes. Copper-bright and copper-hard they were, too hard for a boy's. Give him forty, even forty-five, that would still have made Jan Shortmire a father when he was nearly a hundred and twenty. The longevity treatment produced remarkable results, but none that fantastic. Though health and strength could be restored, fertility, like youth, once vanished was gone forever.

Yet the boy looked too sophisticated to have made a stupid mistake like that, if he were an imposter. More important, he *looked* like Jan Shortmire—not the Shortmire whom Hubbard had known, but the broad-shouldered youth of the early pictures, golden of hair and skin and eyes, almost classical in feature and build. Plastic surgery could have converted a fleeting resemblance to a precise one, yet, somehow, Hubbard *felt* that this was flesh and blood of the old man's.

"You're very like your father," he said, inaccurately: Emrys was less like his father than he should have been, given that startling identity of physique.

"Am I?" The boy smiled. "I never knew him. Of course, I know I look like the pictures, but pictures never tell much, do they?"

He had many papers to give Peter Hubbard. Too many; no honest man had his life so well in order. But then Emrys' honesty was not the issue, only his identity. The birth certificate said he had been born on Clergal fifty-five years before, so he was ten years older than Hubbard's wildest estimate. A young man, but not a boy — a man of full maturity, but still too young to be, normally, Jan Shortmire's son. Then Hubbard opened Emrys Shortmire's passport and received another shock.

He tried to sound calm. "I see you were on Morethis the same time your father was!"

Emrys' smile widened. "Curious coincidence, wasn't it?"

A surge of almost physical dislike filled the lawyer. "Is that all it was — a coincidence?"

"Are you suggesting that I pushed my father into the Ekkan?" Emrys asked pleasantly.

"Certainly not!" Hubbard was indignant at the thought that he,

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as a lawyer, would have voiced such a suspicion, even if it had occurred to him. "I thought you two might have arranged to meet on Morethis."

"I told you I'd never seen my father," Emrys reminded him. "As for what I was doing on Morethis — that's my business."

"All I'm concerned with is whether or not you *are* Emrys Shortmire." Distaste was almost tangible on Hubbard's tongue. "It does seem surprising that, since you *were* on Morethis at the time your father died, you should not have come to claim your inheritance sooner."

"I had affairs of my own to wind up," Emrys said flatly.

HUBBARD tapped the papers. "You understand that these must be checked before you receive your father's estate?"

"I understand perfectly." Emrys' voice was soft as a Si-yllan catman's, and even more insulting. "They will be gone over thoroughly for any possible error, any tiny imperfection, anything that could invalidate my claim. But you will find them entirely in order."

"I'm sure of that." And Hubbard knew, if the papers were forgeries, they would be works of art.

"You'll probably want me to undergo an equally thorough physical examination for signs of — ah — surgical tampering. Yes, I see I'm right."

Ungenerous hope leaped inside Hubbard. "You would object?"

"On the contrary, I'd be delighted. Haven't had a thorough medical checkup for years." On this cooperative note, Emrys Shortmire bowed and left.

Hubbard sighed back against the velvet cushions of his chair — real silk, for he was a very rich old man. Unfortunately, he could not doubt that this was Jan Shortmire's progeny. But — and Hubbard sat upright — no matter how much Emrys resembled his father, that was only one parent. Who had the young man's mother been?

Quickly, Hubbard searched through the papers for the birth certificate. The name was Iloa Tasqi. The nationality: *Morethan.*

No wonder the affair had been kept so secret. No wonder Emrys seemed so strange and that Jan had lied about his previous visit to the dark planet. Small wonder, too, that he'd had a son he was not aware of. Who would have believed that human and Morethan could breed together? For the Morethans, although humanoid, were not at all human.

So Emrys Shortmire was only half human. The other half was — well, the vidicasts called it *monster,* and, now that he had met the young man, Peter Hubbard was inclined to agree.

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II

OUTSIDE the office building, Emrys Shortmire paused and inhaled deeply. Say what you would about the atmospheres of some of the other planets' being fresher and purer, the air of Earth, being the air in which Man had evolved, was the air that felt best in his nostrils and filled his lungs to greatest satisfaction. And, after the fetid atmosphere of Morethis, this was pure heaven. Gray sky and violet dying sun against blue sky and radiant golden sun. No wonder the Morethans were what they were, and Earthmen were what they were.

Well, the golden sun of Earth would set somewhat sooner than the physicists — or the sociologists — had prognosticated. But all that would be long after he himself had died. It was no concern of his, anyway. He was Emrys Shortmire, born out of Jan Shortmire and no mortal woman; and nothing else on Earth, or in the Universe, mattered.

Disdaining the importunate helicabs that besieged him with plaintive mechanical offers of transportation, he walked down the street, enjoying the pull of the planet upon the youth and strength of his body, delighting in the clarity of his vision and the keenness of his nostrils. He was so absorbed in his thoughts and so unaccustomed still to Earth's traffic that he did not look where he was going. The groundcar was upon him before he knew it. Of course something like this would happen, he thought bitterly, as darkness descended upon him and he waited for the crushing impact. It was always like that in the old stories, always some drawback to spoil the magic gift.

But then it was light again. The car had passed over him and he was unharmed, to the amazement — and disappointment — of the avid crowd that had gathered.

"Pedestrians should look where they're going," the voice of the car observed petulantly. "Repairs cost money."

Being part human, Emrys was shaken by the experience. His eye caught the brilliant sign of a bar. Here, he thought, would be syrup to soothe his nerves. And he went inside, eager to try the taste of ancient vintages of Earth — unobtainable on the other planets, since fine wines and liquors could not endure the journey through space.

HE sipped a whisky and soda, trying not to feel disappointed at the savor. As he drank, he felt eyes upon him — the bartender's. Yet the long Qesharakan reflecting glass above the bar showed him nothing unusual about his appearance. Did the bartender

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know who he was? How could he?

Then Emrys noticed that the man glanced from him to someone else — a girl sitting at the other end of the bar. As she met Emrys' eye, she smiled at him. Absently, with remote appreciation of her good looks, he smiled back, then returned to the contemplation of his drink. The bartender's expression deepened to amused contempt.

Emrys realized what was wrong and he could hardly keep from laughing. So intent had he been on the pursuit of his goal that he had almost lost sight of the goal itself. Deliberately, he turned his head and smiled at the girl. She promptly smiled back.

He sat down at her side. Now that he was close, her aquamarine hair showed dark at the roots, and, through the thick golden maquillage, the pores stood out on her nose. Also, she was not so very young. He laughed then, and, when she asked why, bought her a drink. After he had bought her several more, they went to her apartment — a luxurious one in a good section of town. She was not going to be cheap, but, he thought with rising anticipation, he could afford her.

However, the night was curiously unsatisfactory. For him — apparently not for the girl, because the next morning she indignantly refused his money. Evidently the experience had been something out of the ordinary for her. He could not feel it was her fault that it had been nothing for him; the lack was in *him,* he thought, some almost-felt emotion he could not recapture.

Promising to call her, he left, went back to his hotel room and flung himself upon the resilient burim-moss couch.

His body wasn't tired, but his head ached wearily. The liquor, naturally, on an empty stomach . . . after all those years of Morethan qumesht. And then the trip. Even with the Shortmire engines—standard equipment now, of course — it had taken a long, tiring time, for Morethis was the most distant of all the civilized planets. Anyone would be exhausted after such a trip. Added to all this, the accident. There were no bruises on his body yet, but later, he knew, they would be visible.

AT last he slept, or seemed to, and dreamed he was on Morethis again — or Morethis was there with him. The air thickened about him into the tangible atmosphere of the dark planet — the swirling aniline fog that never cleared. And in the midst stood Uvrei, the high priest, robed in amethyst and sable. The term *high priest* was vulgar as applied to him, but the nearest terrestrial equivalent to what he was.

The lips in the shockingly beautiful face parted. "How goes it, son

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of my spirit?" the familiar greeting rolled out, in the familiar voice, deep yet sweet, like dulcet thunder.

"My head hurts, father of my soul." Emrys knew his voice was a petulant child's, yet he could not stop himself. "I was promised—"

"You have not taken care," the ancient one said.

How ancient he was, Emrys did not know. The priests of Morethis were, they said, immortal. And they did live for a long, long time, far longer than the common people, whom they resembled only vaguely. Terrestrial scholars said the ruling class was a variant of the Morethan race, inbred to preserve its identity, probably closer to the original world-shaking Morethans than their debased followers. The members of this group seemed young, as coin faces seem young, also old, like coins themselves.

"I warned you it takes time for the final adjustments to be made. Wait, my son; haste means nothing to you."

"But I've waited so long," Emrys complained.

"Wait a little longer, then. You have all the time in the world."

The fog swirled shut about him, and Emrys sank into his personal miasma of sleep. When he woke up, late that afternoon, he knew from the dank odor clinging to the bedclothes that it had not been a dream, that the priests, the "gods," the "immortals" of Morethis could, as they professed — and even he had not believed them in this — project their minds far through space . . . though, fortunately, not their bodies, or they would not have needed him. He remembered then the vial of tiny golden pellets Uvrei had given him before he left Morethis, and took one. Perhaps that was what the ancient one had meant. At any rate, Emrys thought he felt better afterward.

He examined his body in the mirror to see if bruises had come, but the tawny, muscle-rippled flesh was unmarked. At length he put on his clothes and, leaving the hotel, went to a jeweler, where he bought a costly bracelet to be sent to the girl of the night before. Such a grandiose gesture relieved him — he had always felt — of all further obligation.

He did not wish to repeat his experience with the liquor, so he did not go to a bar. He had no friends on Earth — nor could he have acknowledged them if he had. He did not wish to repeat his disappointment of the previous night, so he did not seek female companionship — although it was obvious from the eyes of the women he passed that he would have no difficulty whenever he changed his mind. But what should he do? What did young men do with their leisure, he tried to remember, when they had nothing but leisure?

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HE dined alone, finally, on a variety of rare terrestrial foods that did not taste quite as he expected, and went to the theater. The play was one he had seen a hundred times before under a hundred different names on many different planets. He went then to a nightclub, but it was crowded and noisy, and the girls did not excite him. Going back to the hotel, he found that sleep, at least, came easily.

But I did not, he thought, *do what I did merely for the sake of a good night's rest.*

The third day, he wandered into a museum. He found himself less bored than he had expected. Perhaps culture would be most therapeutic for him until he reached his ultimate adjustments. Accordingly, he went from the museum to a revival of a nineteenth-century opera. He didn't like it; in fact, it disturbed him so much that he left before the final curtain and walked through the streets for hours, until he ran into a girl who was also walking the streets, and went home with her.

The experience with the drab, as with the courtesan, was mechanically satisfactory, emotionally inadequate. He paid her — knowing she, too, would have given herself for nothing, had she known how— and went to his hotel limp with the same not-physical weakness he had felt before. The effects of the trip or the accident were lingering. He half expected Uvrei to appear that night, but the old one did not come. Why should he? This talk of spirit-son and soul-father was sophistry; there had been a bargain and each had kept his part.

The afternoon of the fourth day, a vidicast reporter called to ask whether Emrys Shortmire was any relation to the Jan Shortmire who had invented the space-warp engines. Emrys could not deny his identity without jeopardizing his inheritance; however, he refused to be interviewed personally or let his picture be used. He did not, he said, want to be dwarfed by his father's reputation. Nonetheless, his arrival was mentioned on the newscasts and panic rose up in him when he heard his name spoken publicly.

The next day a letter came for him. People rarely wrote letters any more, except to the distant planets, yet this one had an Earth postmark. Cold with panic again, he tore it open and read:

My dear Mr. Shortmire:

This evening's vidicast informed me that you were on Earth. You will not, I am sure, know my name. However, I was a friend of your father's, when we were both young men, and it would give me great pleasure to make your acquaintance.

NICHOLAS DYALL

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EMRYS crumpled up the letter and hurled it across the room. He knew Dyall for an old—associate of Jan Shortmire's, but he had not thought him to be alive. What had Dyall done to warrant the longevity treatment? He was nothing but a glorified machinist, a technician. And now he might wreck all of Emrys' plans. But if the young man made no reply, perhaps the old one would take the hint. And so it turned out; there was no further word from Nicholas Dyall.

Finally, two weeks after Emrys had first come to Earth, he got a telecall from Peter Hubbard. His documents were all in order and he could receive his inheritance as soon as he passed the physical examination.

Emrys went to the doctor's offices feeling a cold touch of apprehension again. But all Dr. Jameson said when the examination was finished was, "You have the physique of a man fifteen years your junior, Mr. Shortmire."

Emrys fastened his tunic with fingers that shook from relief. "Guess I'm lucky," he muttered.

The doctor cleared his throat. "Peter Hubbard was telling me about your mother, that she was . . ."

Hubbard, that old fool! And Emrys had been so sure of his discretion. "My mother was Morethan, yes." Then he realized it was possible that Hubbard, too, had felt there might be something not-quite-human manifest in his body and had tried to prepare the doctor. Emrys made his tone more conciliatory. "On both Morethis and Earth, the child takes citizenship from the father, so—"

"I wasn't worrying about any legal problems; I was merely thinking that medical science would be interested."

"I do not wish the fact of my—of my birth publicized in any way — until after my death," Emrys added placatorily. "Surely you can understand what hell life would become if people knew I was half Morethan?"

The doctor sighed. "Yes, I know. I can't blame you."

"Tell me, Doctor," Emrys asked tensely, "is there anything about me that doesn't seem . . . quite human?"

The doctor shook his head. "Only that you're so young for your age. Mr. Shortmire, was your mother one of the caste they call the 'immortals'?" Then he flushed. "Forgive me. I didn't mean to violate—"

Emrys laughed sourly. "Don't worry; I don't hold to the Morethan beliefs. She was one of the so-called gods, yes. They do live somewhat longer than either the common people or terrestrials; I guess that's why the legend arose, probably why I look so young,

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too. I should be glad I didn't inherit a — less pleasant trait."

"You should, indeed," the doctor said somberly.

III

"I LOVE you, Emrys," the woman said, and died agonizedly in his arms. He looked down at the contorted, leaden face, ravaged by sickness, and thought: *Even when she was beautiful, I could not love her.* He could not even feel sorry for her, except in a remote, intellectual way. He could not even feel sorry for himself and his own inability to feel.

Since none of the servants was left in the house — those who were still alive had fled to the country, where there was less chance of contagion — he took her body to the crematorium himself. Other people were there, consigning their grisly burdens to the automatic fires — thin, sickly creatures they were, who would soon be carrion for the firebirds themselves. Whereas he — if he had an emotion left, it would be shame — shame for the radiant youth and health that he saw mirrored in their dully wondering eyes.

Outside, the street was clamorous with the taped importunities of the empty vehicles — so many machines, because there were so few people left. But he chose to walk.

The air was sweet and clean, because the Dyall machines came and took away the bodies of those who fell in the street, and then cleaned those streets as carefully and tenderly as they had done when the walks and gutters had abounded with the vibrant slovenliness of the living. Emrys could, of course, have thrown the woman's body out into the gutter, and the machines would have carried her in their steel maws to the crematorium. But some remembered emotion had kept him from doing such a thing, and had made him give her to the flames with what small ceremony he could muster.

She had been the last mistress remaining to him, and probably, he thought, to any man in the city. Perhaps, out in the country, there might be women with life and lust in them still, but such women as were left here could no longer be considered women. This last one had not been even human for the past week; yet he had tended her — why, he could not say, except that he had nothing better to do. For one thing, she had been quieter when he was near her, and he could not bear her cries.

He was glad when she did die, because playing the good Samaritan had grown tedious as, in their turn, all other roles had palled.

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Even though he knew there would be no more women for him, he was glad. During the first few weeks of the plague, when everyone who had been alive had known that soon they would be dead, all the people on Earth had rushed to squander the life which suddenly seemed to fill them to bursting. Then a man could have had all the women he wanted, all of anything he wanted, for the asking, except the one thing he really wanted — the assurance of life.

NOT everyone had plunged into an orgy of joyless pleasure. There were some who took refuge in prayer — addressed either to the traditional Deity or to the recent importations from the other planets. But, in the end, it was the same for all, prayerful and profligate alike. The only exceptions were the lucky few who seemed to be immune, like Emrys Shortmire, and those who escaped from the cities —to the country or, if they were rich, the other planets. So, even if Emrys had craved women before, he would have had enough of them by now.

As he passed through the streets, he heard a man who walked alone and talked to himself curse the name of Jan Shortmire. *They would tear me to pieces if they knew I was his flesh and blood,* Emrys thought, and smiled to think how once he had feared to be engulfed by Jan Shortmire's reputation, and now he feared to be destroyed by it.

For it had been a starship equipped, like all starships, with the Shortmire engines that had brought back the plague — a starship probing the distant corners of the Galaxy which were all that Man's insatiable curiosity had left undiscovered.

Far out, even beyond Morethis — outermost of the discovered planets — in the middle of the dead and dying stars that were all there was in this chill, cold sector of space, the ship had come upon three dead planets, dark and lifeless. But when it returned to Earth to report the end of Man's ambitions for further conquest, it turned out that one planet had not been quite as lifeless as they had fancied. And the ship had brought back its life — a virus against which terrestrial medicine was powerless.

Emrys could have fled the city; he could have fled the planet. But somehow, after three years on Earth, he had not wanted to. He had spent those years fulfilling the dreams that all young men dream in the murky part of their souls but seldom have the chance to gratify.

As soon as the inheritance was his, he had bought the most lavish mansion that was available at the instant of his desire, furnished it extravagantly, and prepared to en-

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joy himself. His pleasures were many and, some of them, strange. At first his mistresses were human, then non-human. Females of all the intelligent species, save the Morethan, were to be found on Earth, and although consorting with extraterrestrials was illegal, still a wealthy man had never been too much troubled by laws.

But women — females — represented only a fraction of his pleasures, as did the terrestrial vices. He indulged heavily in rrilla, zbokth, mburrje, and all the other outworld pursuits that had been imported from the planets where the native life had been intelligent enough for decadence.

HOWEVER, though he pushed his body a thousand times beyond what should have been the limits of his endurance, the distress he had suffered during the first hours of his landing on Earth did not recur. He remained as clear of eye and trim of form as ever; each physical excess seemed only to improve his splendid health.

Oddly, he did not seem to enjoy these pleasures as much as he had anticipated. Something seemed lacking. It was always like this when you dreamed too long about something, he told himself; no result ever equaled its expectation. And he took another one of the sparkling pills from Morethis. They provided the only satisfaction he seemed able to get.

Emrys had been wrong about Uvrei's indifference. He apparently did consider Emrys his responsibility, over and above the material details of the bargain. The Morethans regarded all those of alien species as enemies, and all those outside the clan as unfriends. Therefore, Emrys began to realize the ceremonies of adoption he had gone through were more than merely honorific or ritual — they had been genuine. It was an uncomfortable conclusion.

"Well, son of my spirit," Uvrei would keep asking, "is this what you wanted?"

"This is what I wanted, father of my soul," Emrys would agree. And it was what he had asked, what he had *thought* he wanted.

The ancient one would smile and say, "Then I am content," and recombine into fog. And Emrys would wonder whether the Morethans had not *known* before they granted him his heart's desire that it would turn to dust and ashes when he had it. Then he would dismiss the thought, telling himself maybe he'd been too impatient for pleasure. After all, how could he, sprung full-blown into a quasi-alien society, hope to become an integral part of it all at once?

So he had waited . . . one year, two years, three years. At the end of the fourth, the plague had struck. And he had stayed on Earth, be-

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cause going to another planet somehow did not seem worthwhile. He was able to take care of his house alone, since the servants had been primarily for show, and the great Dyall machine — which was all the house, essentially, was — could run itself. Whenever a part of it broke down, he repaired it himself, glad of the opportunity to have something to do with his hands.

Finally he realized that he must be immune; hence a lifetime waited ahead of him. So he turned to learning, for the vast libraries of tapes and books remained changeless amid the disaster. He read and he learned a great deal, and if he could not derive pleasure from this, at least there was a deep intellectual appreciation that almost took its place.

The doctors on Ndrikull, the most advanced of the other planets, at last managed to find a serum that would kill the plague — that is, they maintained it was their serum that had killed it. Some suggested that the virus had died because Earth's environment had eventually proved hostile to it. But Earth did not die, even though most of its people had, because the great machines that took care of it — the Dyall machines — had kept functioning.

Gradually, most of the people who had fled to the other planets came back, and those who had survived in the country returned to the cities. Earth was restored to its former splendor as the social and political capital of the Galaxy, though Ndrikull now was the financial center and rivaled Earth for artistic honors. But still Emrys stuck to his books. Once in a while, he would sink himself for a week or a month in what would be, for other men, physical pleasure, just to see if his reactions had changed, but they had grown even more impersonal.

WHEN Emrys Shortmire had been ten years on Earth, he eventually ran into Nicholas Dyall, at the opening of a scientific exposition. As soon as he saw Dyall in the crowd, he turned to go, but Dyall had seen him at the same time, and hurriedly limped across the room.

"You must be Emrys Shortmire," he declared, in a voice of surprising resonance for so old a man. "You look so much like Jan, I couldn't be mistaken." Grasping his stick with one hand for support, he extended the other to Emrys, who could not refuse it. "But you are so young . . ."

"I'm older than I look," Emrys said uncomfortably; then remembered to add, "You were a friend of my father's, sir?"

"A hundred years ago, yes. My name is Nicholas Dyall."

"I've heard of you; you're the

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man who — who invented all those machines," Emrys said, trying not to sound too ingenuous. "I've heard people say you revolutionized our technology as much as—"

"As much as your father revolutionized our civilization? Yes, both of us are responsible for a great deal. Luckily, your father is dead."

"Luckily?" Emrys echoed.

"Luckily for him, I mean." The old man sighed. "But you are too young to understand." Then his dark face relaxed into a smile. "I won't ask if you received the letter I sent when you first arrived on Earth. I can understand that a young man would wish the society of other — young people."

Emrys avoided Dyall's eye, and, so doing, met the gaze of the girl standing next to the old man, and stopped, transfixed. She was very young, less than forty, he judged, perhaps even less than thirty.

It was long since he had seen a woman like her. Her hair was a soft yellow, the only natural color among all the women in the room. Her face was painted pink and white, not the blues fashionable that year. Instead of being twisted and bedizened with cloth into fantastic shapes and protuberances, her pretty body was clad in a simple translucent slip. Yet, in spite of her almost deliberate dowdiness, she was beautiful — not the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but the most . . . no, striking was not it, either. What *was* the word he wanted? He could not dredge it out of the pool in which so many of his memories had been submerged for want of room.

"This is my great-great-granddaughter Megan," Dyall introduced her. The girl nodded and smiled. After a moment, Emrys forced himself to do the same.

"I won't press you to come visit us, Mr. Shortmire," Dyall said to Emrys as he and his descendant finally turned to leave, "but I hope that you will."

"We should be so glad to see you," the girl said, with a shy smile.

"Perhaps—perhaps I will come," he found himself saying. "One day." The two men shook hands, and Nicholas Dyall and his great-great-granddaughter moved away. Emrys stared after them for a minute; then, without paying any attention to the exhibits, he went back to his house and spent the rest of the evening staring at the falling flakes in his snowplace.

For years, he had thought he'd lost any capacity to feel. Now he knew that was not true . . . because he had been moved by Megan Dyall. How, he could not say — not even whether it was love or hate he felt toward her — but he *felt*. That was the important thing, and, because of that, he had to take the risk and call on them.

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HE waited a week, then went to the Dyall house — a mansion, less ostentatious than his, but probably more expensive. Dyall greeted him warmly. "I'm glad you decided to come. Your father and I were not close friends, but he was the only one left of my generation whom I knew. It was a shock to hear of his passing, even though I hadn't seen him for a century or so."

"You've lived for such a long time, Grandpa," Megan said in her high, sweet voice, "it's hard to imagine. But why doesn't everybody get the longevity treatment, so we can all live a long time?"

"Because it's difficult and expensive," her ancestor said, smiling over her golden head at Emrys. "Because the old must make way for the young. It is only given to those whose lives, the government feels, should be prolonged, either because of the contributions they can still make, or whose contributions have already been so great that this is the only fitting reward."

The girl stared at him with large blue eyes. "Does that mean you will live forever, Grandpa?"

"No," the old man told her. "All our science can give is an extra half century. I don't know how long my life span would have been, but I'm past the average and the extra half century, and so I'm living on borrowed time."

The blue eyes filled with tears. "I don't want you to die, Grandpa. I don't want to grow old and die, either."

Dyall looked down at her, and there was, Emrys thought, an odd perplexity in his gaze. Didn't he find it natural for a young girl not to like the idea of old age, of death?

"But I shall want to die when my time comes, Megan," Dyall said. "We all will." Gently, he touched her cheek. "Perhaps, by the time you make your contribution to society, scientists will know how to give youth as well as extra years. More years are not really much of a gift to the old."

"But I can't do anything, Grandpa," she sobbed. "I have nothing to contribute."

It was an outrage, Emrys thought, that this woman, by being the essence of femininity, should be denied the ultimate reward society had to offer. Motherhood alone should entitle her . . . He was, of course, already envisioning himself as the father of her children. *But could he be a father?*

Old Dyall was saying, "Perhaps, Megan, by the time you are old enough, our government will be wise enough to realize that beauty, of itself, deserves the greatest reward Man can give." He turned to Emrys. "Forgive me for getting so sentimental, but Megan looks as uncannily like her great-great-

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grandmother — my wife — as . . . you look like your father. I can't bear to think she must die, too. It's a pity there is no way she can stay young and beautiful for all time."

Emrys found his fists clenching. The fingers were cold.

"Alissa's portrait was painted just before I married her," the old man said. "She was just about Megan's age then. Come, I'd like you to see it."

No! something inside Emrys cried out, but he could not courteously — or any other way — refuse to follow the old man.

They went into another room. Hanging over the mantelpiece was the painting of a girl in old-fashioned clothes. Anyone, not knowing, would have taken her to be Megan. But Emrys knew she was not, and suddenly he let himself remember what it was that Megan meant to him . . . and why he hated Nicholas Dyall with such coruscating fury.

IV

"YOU should have sent for me to come to you, Mr. Hubbard," Nicholas Dyall said, with a gentle pity that infuriated the old lawyer, who knew that he himself was young enough to be Dyall's grandson. Hubbard was jealous—he would not conceal it from himself — bitterly jealous. It had not been hard for him to rationalize Jan Shortmire's gift of years as a worthless one; that old man's bitterness and disillusionment had not inspired envy. But this hale and rosy old man seemed to be enjoying his years.

I may not have made any signal contribution to human welfare, Hubbard thought resentfully, *but I have done my best. Why must I die at an age fifty years short of the age which this man is allowed to reach?*

"I am perfectly able to get about, Mr. Dyall," he said in icy tones, "since I am in excellent health."

Which he was, the doctor had told him, adding, however, "for your age."

"What is more," Hubbard continued, "since I was on Ndrikull, it might have seemed rather presumptuous for me to send for you; whereas I had always been planning to return to Earth one day. I left at the time of the plague."

"You were wise. I merely retired to the country. I escaped the virus, but the rest of my family was less fortunate. I have but one remaining — my great-great-granddaughter."

"Yes," Hubbard said, "I know. It's because of her I've come to see you."

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He had not really planned ever to return to Earth. Ndrikull had been comfortable and a man of his age did not risk a trip through space unless the need was urgent. The memory of Emrys Shortmire had disturbed him from time to time, but, he thought, probably the young man had died of the plague. Even if he had not, what good would it do for Peter Hubbard to be present on Earth? He could not counteract the presence of an evil force without knowing the quality of that evil.

Then, picking up the kind of journal he did not usually read, he had seen mentioned the fact that Jan Shortmire's son was "courting" Nicholas Dyall's great-great-granddaughter. And he had known the need was now urgent. He must go back to Earth and warn someone; it was his duty. A letter could not convey the hatred and fear with which the young man had inspired him. Obviously, old Dyall had been the person to warn. Yet he did not seem right.

I do not like this man, Hubbard thought. And then: *This is the second man I have taken such an instant dislike to. Can it be senility rather than perceptiveness, and have I been foolish to come all this way?*

"You've come because of Megan?" Dyall raised eyebrows that were still thick and black. "Have you met her? Do you know her?" His voice sharpened. "She has never spoken of you."

"I have never met her," Hubbard said, and saw Dyall relax. Hubbard waited, but the other man said nothing, so he went on, "I wanted to talk to you about the man she's been seeing, this Emrys Shortmire." Leaning forward, Hubbard spoke slowly, as if, by giving weight to each word, he could make them sound less fantastic. "He's a monster. Literally, I mean. His mother was a Morethan. Or *is.* For all I know, she may still be alive."

HUBBARD had not thought of this before, and it shook him. Yet, if Iloa Tasqi was alive, then Emrys Shortmire must be considered to be, to all intents and purposes, Morethan entirely, working only for the interests of that planet. After all, his mother had been the only parent the boy had known. Even on Clergal, he must have been brought up under a strong Morethan influence. Now, if the female was still alive, then the influence would be alive, too. Since Morethans were not permitted on Earth, there would be an obvious advantage for them in having someone here.

Dyall was holding back a smile, not too well. "I didn't know a human and a Morethan could — ah — breed together."

And, obviously, he didn't be-

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lieve it. There was no way Hubbard could prove it, unless he asked Emrys to produce his birth certificate again. "It isn't generally known that the two species can reproduce together," he finally said, "nor should it be."

Then he looked directly in Dyall's black eyes — impossible that eyes so keen should be so deliberately blind, that any aware human being should not have sensed *something* of that dark aura. "Haven't you felt something strange about young Shortmire?" he asked.

"Can't say I have," Dyall chuckled. "He seems an agreeable enough young fellow."

"He's sixty-five years old."

"Really? I should have taken him to be younger. But youth lasts longer these days. And there's—" Dyall gave a little laugh — "no crime in being old, or you and I would be in prison, wouldn't we?"

Hubbard would not let himself be distracted. "He looked less than forty when he came to Earth, and he hasn't, I understand, changed in the past ten years."

"Ten years is not so long." Dyall's swarthy hands began playing with the ornaments on his desk. Clearly, he was impatient to be rid of his tedious caller, and Hubbard struggled with the instinctive good breeding that told him to get up and leave. This was not a social call, so it did not matter that he was boring his host, however.

On the other hand, he was not getting anywhere. Perhaps he could *blast* the other out of his smugness. "Look, Dyall, I know this is an outrageous thing for a man of my profession to say. I haven't a shred of proof, not a suspicion — but I'm morally sure he killed his father."

Instead of showing shock or anger or even thought, Dyall merely gave him a tolerant smile. "You're an old man, Mr. Hubbard. We're both old men," he amended graciously, "so we're apt to — jump at shadows."

I'm an old man, Hubbard thought angrily, *and you're an old fool!*

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with the young man," Dyall continued, "or not-so-young man, if you prefer. He appears to be very fond of Megan, and if he should choose to marry her, it would ease my mind considerably. I've exceeded my life span myself, you know."

Since Peter Hubbard had done the same, and his span was considerably shorter, he had no sympathy. "You'd — let the strain continue?"

"Perhaps it's a good strain. I understand the Morethans are said to be immortal. If so, the genes might be a desirable addition to our own."

He was laughing openly now.

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Hubbard almost wept with helplessness. There must be *something* he could do. But what? He could not take the trip to Morethis; he would certainly die on the way. And what could he do there? There was no guarantee that, if there was anything to be found, he would find it, or even if he reached the planet alive, that he would go back alive.

"Won't you stay and dine with us tonight, Mr. Hubbard?" Dyall asked.

"No — no, thank you," Hubbard said, feeling no necessity for making an excuse. The offer had represented only the barest kind of courtesy.

Dyall got up. "Perhaps another night then?"

"Perhaps." Hubbard rose to his feet also, trying to appear brisk and alert and *young*. At least he could walk without aid, he thought, staring pointedly at the stick leaning against the wall. "I would rather you didn't tell Shortmire I had come to see you about him."

"Of course not, if you wish."

But Hubbard knew Dyall would not keep the stranger's visit from his friend. Odd that Dyall and young Shortmire should be friends. Not so odd either, though; young Shortmire had no reason to love his father. Besides, although Jan Shortmire had hated Nicholas Dyall, that did not mean Nicholas Dyall had hated Jan Shortmire, or even knew of the other man's animosity.

AS he was riding back to his hotel, Hubbard let his tired old body indulge the aches and pains that were its rightful heritage. As his body relaxed, his mind relaxed, and he began to think more clearly. Perhaps Dyall would not listen to him — perhaps Dyall had some reason for not listening — but the government might.

What young Shortmire might have done as a human, they would consider a matter for local law — but the fact that human and Morethan had begotten offspring would interest them. The fact that the Morethans might have managed at last to get a spy on Earth would interest them. If Emrys would not surrender his birth certificate, they could get another from Clergal. Only, would the government's representative believe Hubbard enough to get that birth certificate? Or would they, like Dyall, dismiss him as a doddering old fool?

The private humiliation had been hard enough; he hated to risk a public one. But it was his duty to tell officialdom of his suspicions, he knew miserably. Never again could he think with pride of himself as a worthy citizen if he didn't at least make the attempt. Never again could he let himself feel a justifiable jealousy of those with endowments superior to his, if

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he did not prove himself worthy of what he had.

Well, there was no hurry; he would sleep on it. He was mistaken. In the morning, before he had even started to decide upon any course of action, the front desk called to announce that a Mr. Shortmire wished to see him.

"Very well," the old lawyer said wearily into the machine, *to* the machine, for it was the Dyall itself speaking. "Send him up."

A short while later, there was a rap on the door. "Come in," Hubbard called.

The door slid open. A man entered, a tawny golden youth with eyes like burnished metal. "Do you know who I am, Peter?"

"Of course," Hubbard said, faintly disgusted, since he considered melodrama vulgar. "You're Emrys Shortmire."

"You're wrong," the man said. "I'm Jan Shortmire."

V

EMRYS Shortmire had gone home the night Dyall had shown him the portrait of his long-dead wife, and Emrys had dreamed, not of Megan Dyall, but of Alissa Embel, Megan's great-great-grandmother, whom he had wanted a hundred years before, and who had married Nicholas Dyall. Consciously, he had forgotten her, but at the back of his mind, she had, for over a century, walked hand in hand with his hatred.

That night he understood what he had not realized then. He had completed the engines with which he had been tinkering for years with a real vengeance. He had taken the first starship out into space himself — when no one had faith in his engines, least of all himself — merely "to show her" what a great man he was, even if he died in the showing. In his spite, he had opened up the stars for mankind.

And when he returned, years later, he found that Dyall, too, had stopped tinkering and had changed the pattern of his gadgets to one more acceptable to the public taste. Before, they had operated quite satisfyingly, but they had not been salable in the shape he had given them, and no manufacturer had been interested in leasing the patents. Now that he had yielded, manufacturers were falling all over themselves to get the right to produce his machines.

Dyall's was not as soul-stirring a success as Shortmire's — he did not inspire cheering crowds and parades — but a more enduringly popular one. The Shortmire engines carried humanity to the stars, but it was the Dyall machines that

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cooked humanity's dinners and kept its houses clean. So humanity respected Jan Shortmire and took Nicholas Dyall to its collective heart.

Emrys awakened, remembering all this and rigid with loathing for Nicholas Dyall, and for the world which had allowed Nicholas Dyall to take from him something he had wanted. Something which had, as soon as he'd known for sure he'd lost it forever, become what he wanted most. And also he hated the world which had given Alissa Embel to Dyall and had then proceeded to heap on him in addition every honor Jan Shortmire himself had won in an effort to make up for what he'd lost. Jan Shortmire had risked his life in space; Nicholas Dyall had sat comfortably in his chair — and both were equally honored.

Then Emrys — as Emrys — caught hold of himself. It was true that originally there had been injustice. But it had been righted and so there was no more reason to hate Dyall. *I have a second chance, but he will have none. I will live out another full lifetime, and I will have Megan, too, and he'll die in a few years. And as for the world, I have already revenged myself on it in advance.*

He got up and pulled a spun-metal robe about him, amethyst and sable — a gift from Morethis. There was always a costly gift on his birthday, either out of kindness or cruelty, together with a vial of the golden capsules.

What a pity, he thought, as he went downstairs, that Dyall and the world both would never know the truth: that Jan Shortmire had no son, that Emrys and Jan Shortmire were one.

THE Morethans first came to Jan Shortmire when, approaching his natural old age, he had traveled as a visitor to their planet — largely because old men did not go to Morethis — and they had made him their offer. He had laughed in their dark and exquisite faces.

"My own government will give me fifty years more of life," he said, for he had heard, during the voyage out, that he would be on the next honors list. "What need do I have of you?"

"We can give you far more than fifty years," they'd told him. "And youth, besides."

At that, he had stopped laughing, but still he had not accepted their offer, for many reasons . . . doubt and fear, perhaps some shreds of honor, and certainly, since he was a man of science, skepticism.

Then, when Shortmire was nearing the end of those fifty extra years which had, indeed, been granted him by a grateful Earth government — together with a

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plaque, suitably inscribed — he had received a gift. It was one of those great crystalline prisms from Morethis that were so fashionable on Earth as lighting fixtures, not because they saved fuel — for one such prism would cost ten lifetimes of fuel — but because they gave a light no Earthborn device could give, making the old look young, the stupid wise, and, most important of all, the ugly beautiful.

Shortmire looked into the lambent depths, wondering who had sent him so costly and so useless a gift. Suddenly the flame vitrified into a face that flashed up at him from the crystal — a face that was beautiful in its horror, and horrible in its beauty. He closed his eyes, but when he opened them, the iridescent eyes were still there, mocking him for his cowardice.

"I am Uvrei," a deep voice of tingling sweetness said, "god among gods and man among men. I bring you greetings from Morethis, Jan Shortmire."

Shortmire knew well enough what Uvrei must want, for the Morethans' long-ago offer had risen of late to the top of his thoughts. They could not do what they claimed, he had tried to reassure himself, whenever the memory returned; it was a trick which he had been clever enough not to fall for. But part of his mind did not believe this, and that part was glad to see Uvrei.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded.

The Morethan smiled, and each glittering tooth was a fiery brilliant. "The same as before, on the same terms," he said, offering no enticements. The man who would accept such an offer would provide his own.

IF they were capable of doing this . . . thing with the crystal, then they might also have other powers. So Shortmire could no longer pretend that what they offered him was impossible. On the other hand, what they required of him in return was truly terrible. Could they really do what they said?

After all, my world has not done overmuch for me. Others, like Nicholas Dyall, have wealth and power and . . . He would not let himself think of Alissa Dyall, since she must long be dead, of old age, if nothing else. The last he had heard of her was when she and Dyall had announced their wedding date. Then he had taken the ship fitted out with the engines everyone said would not work, and he had fled into space. When he had come back, no one had spoken of her, and gradually, in his newfound importance, he had to some degree forgotten her, though he never forgot Dyall.

Pity to think of Alissa as having grown old. Even more of a pity to

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think of himself as having grown old, for he could see that in every mirror he passed.

"You're sure you can give me youth as well as life?" he asked.

"Not only youth, but perpetual youth," Uvrei assured him. "Youth such as you did not know even when you were young."

But Shortmire was still suspicious. Even if the Morethans could do what they said, how did he know they would? An alien concept of honor might have no reference to the terrestrial one. "How do I know I can trust your word?"

Uvrei's face grew black, literally black, and the crystal shivered until, Emrys thought, it would split. And he shivered, too, knowing in the fine nerves and little muscles of his body what would happen to him at the final shivering. A fear filled him then that he had never known before, not even when he faced space for the first time, and in the midst of that fear came the thought that, if he truly hated Earth, this was the most artistically nasty revenge he could take.

THE crystal trembled to stillness as Uvrei's face paled to composure. "If you were not an Earthman, Jan Shortmire," he said, "we would not have needed you, nor you us. And an Earthman could not be expected to know that the words you have just spoken are the insult that, on Morethis, is deadlier than death; for the word of an immortal — no matter to whom or what he gives it — is as sacred and enduring as he himself."

"I apologize," Shortmire said quickly, "for my ignorance."

"And I forgive you," Uvrei declared, as grandly as if he *were* a god, "because of that ignorance. Moreover, since you cannot help your racial deficiencies, I will make this bargain with you. Come to Morethis. There we will give you the life and youth we promised. Then, when you are satisfied that we have given you what you desire, you will give us what we desire."

Not having been too honorable a man in his own hundred and fifty-five years, Jan Shortmire still could not believe that the Morethans would act in all honor. However, even the remote possibility that they would play fair was strong temptation for an ardent man pushing death. So he had agreed. He had wound up his affairs and made his will in favor of "his son." Then he had left Earth to go to Morethis, to die as Jan Shortmire and he resurrected as Emrys Shortmire.

The Morethans had kept their word, though there were times when he wished they had not. For no phoenix casting itself into the fire to burn alive in agony, so that it might rise again, young and

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strong and purified, from the ashes of its own dead self, could have suffered the excruciating torment of both mind and body that he suffered as, little by little, he was made young again.

Uvrei had warned him that this would happen. "To become one of us, you must be capable of all-endurance." So, for three years, he had lived on the miasmic planet, suffering unending, unbearable pain — not only his, but of the others whose lives went to make his new life. Slowly, agonizingly, these were stirred into the shrieking cauldrons of his body, until they blended and melted and coalesced to become his new shape.

Then Uvrei had led him ceremoniously to a reflecting glass and shown him Emrys Shortmire — a boy far more handsome than the boy Jan Shortmire had been, though, at the same time, his twin. The only thing not quite human about Emrys Shortmire was his eyes, and how could they be human after what they had seen? But he would forget all that once he was back on Earth, forget the payment that had been exacted — and prepare to live his new life to the full.

ALL this Emrys Shortmire told Peter Hubbard in the quiet of the expensive hotel room. It was pleasant to be able to unburden himself at last. For the past eleven years, there had been a secret side of him that must always walk apart, even from Megan. Now there was someone who could know the whole of him, and he was grateful to Hubbard for having come back to Earth.

But Hubbard sat there staring with so fixed a gaze that, for a moment, Emrys thought he was dead. Then he realized that it was only shock; all this had been too much for so old a man. Selfishly, he had heaped his burden upon another, without asking whether that other was willing, or able, to share it.

"Peter," he began, "I'm sorry . . ." not quite sure for what he was apologizing. He could not have trusted the old man at the beginning, just as he *had* to trust him now. But of course he was apologizing to Peter Hubbard, as the representative of humanity, for what he himself had done to Earth.

He began to give unasked-for explanations. "I deliberately made you suspect I killed my father, because if you suspected one of us had done away with the other, why, then, you'd automatically have assumed there were two." He looked down at the floor. "And I wanted you to hate me. We couldn't be friends; otherwise, knowing me better than anyone else alive, you might have guessed . . ."

"I doubt it," Hubbard said wearily. "Almost anything else

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would have seemed more likely." Presently he asked, "Weren't you afraid I might investigate?"

Emrys smiled. "What could you find out? After all, I *hadn't* killed Jan Shortmire."

The smile became a little fixed. "I wouldn't have cared even if you had told someone your suspicions then," Emrys went on doggedly, "because I knew no one would believe you. But now—" he colored — "well, I don't want you to tell Megan Dyall anything . . . bad about me. You see, I . . . . love her."

"I gathered that impression," Hubbard said.

But why does he sound so unhappy about it? Emrys thought angrily. *What's wrong with me?* Because he was in love, he could not appreciate the irony of that thought.

VI

PETER Hubbard looked at his old friend with the young face and the young body and the eyes that were unhuman — but less so than before. This was a frightful thing that had been done, and by and by he would feel the full horror of it. Right now he was too numb to care. He felt, as Emrys Shortmire must have felt on coming back to Earth, detached and without interest. *But I've felt this way before,* he thought; *it's because I'm old.*

"Were you really satisfied with your bargain, Jan?" he asked, almost casually.

"Not at first," the boy admitted, sinking down on the couch and clasping his hands around his knees. So young, so graceful, and so . . . unnatural. "It seemed to me then that the Morethans had given me youth and taken away humanity. Because, once I found I was physically capable, I found I didn't really want the things I had craved so much before."

"So they did trick you?" When all was said and done, Hubbard thought, you could never trust an alien life-form, a foreigner.

"No, *no!* You still don't understand. The way I see it is that . . . certain elements in us may not mean anything to them. They don't know they're there, so they wouldn't realize that anything got lost in . . .the process."

"Do you think, Jan," Hubbard asked slowly, "that the way you felt — or didn't feel — might not have anything to do with the Morethans at all? That, for all your young body, you are an old man and feel like an old man?"

"Nonsense! I know what it is to feel like an old man, and I know what it is to feel like a young man, and I — I felt like neither."

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"When a man has lived a certain number of years," Hubbard said, knowing that envy gave the truth relish, "he is an old man. Age is in the mind and heart, not only in the body."

"That's a lie!" Then Emrys said, more calmly, "If that's so, why did everything change when I met Megan? Because I found then that my emotions had not been lost! I had a feeling for her that I'd never had for another woman — not even for Alissa, I think. I hadn't imagined there could be a woman like Megan in the world, so sweet and amiable and completely feminine." He looked angrily at Hubbard. "You think I'm sentimental, don't you?"

Hubbard tried to smile. "There's nothing wrong with sentiment." But sentimentality was characteristic of an old man's love.

Emrys laughed and hugged his knees. He was overdoing the ingenuousness. Of course he deliberately played the part of a boy young enough to be his own great-great-grandson, because he was wooing a woman young enough to be his own great-great-granddaughter. And Hubbard remembered how he himself had attempted to move briskly before Nicholas Dyall. Emrys Shortmire would not have the physical aches that he'd had as a result, but could there be psychical aches? Could an old man ever actually be young?

EMRYS' face grew sober. "I've never touched her, Peter — really touched her, I mean. She's not like other women, you know."

"I know," Hubbard said, remembering back to the time when he, too, had been in love. Only the memory was not tender in him, because he had married the girl and lived with her for nearly seventy years.

"Peter, you aren't listening!"

"I'm sorry," the old man said, waking from his reverie. "What were you saying?"

"I said, do you think Megan would be willing to marry me, if she knew I was older than her great-great-grandfather?"

But there was a more important question that Hubbard could no longer refuse to face. "Jan, what did you give the Morethans in return for what they gave you?"

"You haven't answered my question."

"I can't answer it, because I don't know the girl. But you can answer mine, because you know what you gave the Morethans."

Emrys was silent for a moment; then he laughed. "I gave them my soul," he said lightly. "Like that fellow in the opera."

"I know that. What I'm afraid of is that it wasn't enough. In what form did you give it to them, Jan?"

"You have no right to catechize me like that."

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The old man's voice was soft. "I think I have."

Emrys was a long time in answering. When he finally spoke, his voice was flat and dead. "All right, I gave them the blueprints for the space-warp engines. What else did I have to give them in exchange?"

Hubbard expelled a long breath. He had answered this question for himself many minutes before. Still, the shock of confirmation was too great. All hope was gone now. "Perhaps you had a right to sell your own soul, Jan, but you had no right to sell humanity's." His good breeding held up all the way. This man had betrayed the whole of mankind, and so he, Peter Hubbard, reproached him gently for it. Though, come to think of it, what good would savage recrimination—or anything—do?

"But *you* don't have to worry about it, Peter!" Emrys cried. "Listen, the Morethan technology is so alien, so different from ours, because it's based on mental rather than physical forces, that it'll take centuries before they can acquire the techniques they'll need to build the engines. And they'll have trouble getting the materials. We'll both have been long in our graves by the time they'll reach Earth."

"And that makes it all right? It doesn't matter to you what happens to your own home planet once you are dead?"

THE young-looking face was flushed. "Why should it? Does Earth care what happens to me? During the plague, they cursed my name because I invented the star-engines. That's the only time Earth remembered me."

"During the plague, men were insane, Jan," Hubbard said, knowing his own sweet reasonableness was ludicrous under the circumstances, "not responsible for what they said. They don't curse your name any more."

"No, they've forgotten it." Emrys looked at Hubbard with blazing, unhuman eyes. "Why should you expect me to put their welfare before my own?"

"You must, if the race is to survive."

Hubbard expected Emrys to say, "Why should it survive?" but apparently there was a grain of emotion left here. "It will survive. The Morethans are not—" the word seemed to stick in Emrys' throat —"monsters."

"Jan," Hubbard said in a monotone, "eleven years ago, after you came to Earth for your inheritance, I became interested in Morethis — naturally enough, I suppose. I started scanning everything I could lay my hands on, and I learned a great deal about it — as much, I believe, as anyone off Morethis knows. Except, of course, you."

Emrys rose and began to pace

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the floor. "Nobody really knows anything about Morethis. Most of what has been written is a—a pack of lies. One liar copied from another, and so they perpetuate the lie. Scandal has always sold better than truth!"

Hubbard said, "There is a legend that the Morethans once had limited space travel, though no way of warping space to bring the distant stars closer, since they did not use engines. But there were many stars close to them, and they traveled from system to system, sucking each one dry. Then there were no living planets left in their sector of space, and their engineless ships could not bridge the gap to the next cluster, so they found themselves trapped on a dying planet that revolved around a dying star, and they, as a race, began to die themselves."

Emrys tried to laugh. "Looks like a fine case of poetic justice, but—"

"Wait. I haven't finished. The race did not die completely; it decayed. Certain among the people stayed alive through sucking the lives of the others; certain among them still kept some vestiges of the old traditions and knowledge; certain among them waited."

"Is that the end of your story?"

Hubbard nodded. Emrys' face was ashen. "Well, it's an old wives' tale," he sputtered. "All the Morethans want is to be able to compete on an equal basis with Earth. They don't want to be exploited, nor do they intend to . . ." As his eyes caught Hubbard's, his voice trailed off. "Anyhow, I'll be dead," he said. "I don't give a damn what happens after I'm dead."

HUBBARD didn't believe it. He couldn't. There is no man who has not some love for his own kind, be it ever so little, merely because they look like him.

"You won't tell anybody who I really am?" Emrys asked childishly. "You're still my friend, aren't you?"

Hubbard sighed. Was he still this creature's friend? He didn't know. "Who would believe me?" he finally asked. "And even if they did, what's the use? Nothing can be done. The only thing that's ever protected us from the Morethans is distance. When they reach Earth, they will have already conquered us. Mental powers are always stronger than physical powers at close range."

"That's right." Emrys seemed to be relieved at the idea that the question was out of his hands. "Too late now to do anything about it."

Hubbard nodded. There was no way out that he could see.

"But you *do* promise not to tell old Dyall that I'm my father instead of me?" Emrys asked anxiously.

"Even if he believed me, he

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wouldn't care. All he wants is a good match for that great-great-granddaughter of his."

But was that all? As far as money went, Nicholas Dyall was reputed to be the richest man alive. And if he was truly fond of the girl, would he not at least have investigated the young man?

"You're *hard!*" Emrys complained, but without rancor.

"I have a suspicious nature," Hubbard said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's the legal mind. At any rate, I don't care for Nicholas Dyall."

"Well, I don't either, but I don't really give a hang what kind of a great-great-grandfather-in-law I'm getting. All I care about is Megan. Do you think it's wrong for me to ask her to marry me?"

"Can't you understand that, at this stage, the girl doesn't matter?"

"No," Emrys said simply. "I cannot imagine her not mattering."

After he had gone, Hubbard still found himself thinking about Nicholas Dyall. In his whole lifetime, the old lawyer had personally known only two men whom society had deemed worthy of its highest honor, the longevity treatment. And these were more than most men had met, for the longevity treatment was given to very few. Both of the two, Dyall and Shortmire, had some defect in their personalities that warped them—all but completely, in Shortmire's case — away from the human virtues.

Was that defect a part of the creative talent that had earned the individual his right to the treatment? Or did it arise as an effect of the treatment itself? Because, if that was the case, then Earth's longevity treatment might be nothing more than a primitive form of the Morethan "process."

Since only straws remained to be grasped at, no one thing Hubbard did would be more futile than any other. And since he had nothing better to do, he might just as well investigate this new avenue. Jan Shortmire had hated Nicholas Dyall. Had Nicholas Dyall hated Jan Shortmire with equal venom? And, if so, had he done anything about it?

VII

A GONG sounded and a mechanical voice announced, "Mr. Peter Hubbard to see Mr. Dyall and Mr. Shortmire."

"Do you mean to say he has the *gall* to come see us, after the accusations he made against you, Emrys?" Dyall demanded incredulously. "I still can't understand why you sent him an invitation to

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the wedding, but that he should make a casual social call . . .!"

"We've come to terms." Emrys smiled. "After all, at his age, he can't be held accountable for everything he says."

"I'm at least fifty years older than he is!" the old engineer almost spat. "And you — do you mean that I am not responsible for what I say?"

Knowing that he was the other man's senior by some twenty years himself, Emrys was malevolently pleased. "Some people retain their faculties longer than others," he observed. "And Hubbard was my father's friend, as well as his lawyer, so he's the closest thing to a relative that I have on Earth. Except you, of course; you were my father's friend, too."

Dyall's lips tightened. "How does Hubbard know you're in this house right now? Do you think he's having you followed?"

It was possible, but Emrys didn't care. For almost a year now, his life had been blameless, and, strangely, it suited him to live that way. "I'm here in this house most of the time. It wouldn't be hard for him to figure out where he could find me."

The gong sounded again. Dyall looked undecided.

"If *I* can forgive him, sir," Emrys said gently, "surely *you* can."

"Show him in," Dyall rasped to the machine.

Megan rose to go, but Emrys kept hold of her small, cold hand. "I'd like you to meet Peter Hubbard, dear. He's really a nice old fellow when you get to know him. Just a bit too much of a do-gooder, that's all."

Dyall snorted.

"I shall be glad to know any friend of yours, Emrys," Megan said, sitting down again obediently.

After a moment, Peter Hubbard came into the room. "Peter, this is my fiancée, Megan Dyall." Smilingly, Emrys waited for the usual inane felicitations. He couldn't expect a man of Hubbard's age to be bowled over by this loveliness, but still surely no man, no matter how ancient, could be completely insensible to the girl's charm.

Hubbard stood still and stared at her. "Amazing . . ." he murmured. "Amazing . . ." Then he turned to Dyall. "You are to be congratulated, sir."

Emrys was annoyed. He knew Hubbard was too well-bred to make a remark like that unintentionally. However, he pretended to be amused and said, "You're supposed to congratulate *me*, Peter."

But Hubbard continued his inexplicable rudeness by paying no attention to Emrys and, instead, staring at Nicholas Dyall. And finally Dyall said, with a strangled laugh, "I think perhaps in this instance Mr. Hubbard is right."

He threw himself into an easy

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chair with an attempt at nonchalance, but it was embarrassingly apparent that his stick was not enough to support him any more. His old body was trembling. And Emrys found that he himself was trembling, too.

THERE was a painful silence. Everyone seemed to be waiting. Even Megan glanced from one to the other with her usual expression of bright-eyed interest.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Hubbard," Dyall said at last, "you've reached your conclusions too late to do anything except perhaps hasten an end that is, you'll concede, by now inevitable."

"Yes," Hubbard agreed, "you've won *your* game." He came a little further into the room, so that he was standing over the other old man. "I do believe that, of the two, you are the worse. He did what he did out of spite. You created that spite and kept it alive."

Dyall's dark face flushed and his hands tightened on his cane. "But I had a right to do what I did. And I hurt only one person. Two, if you include me. Give me credit, at least, for the smallness of my scope."

Hubbard glanced at Megan. And Dyall broke into the shrill cackle of an old man. "But you know, you *know*, and still you think of her! How sentimental can you get? Don't you realize—"

"How much does she?" Hubbard said. "How much do you?"

Emrys had become nearly frantic with frustration and bewilderment. He was the one who had secrets; nobody else. Nothing was to be kept hidden from *him!* "What are you two blabbering about?" he almost screamed. "It doesn't make sense — any of it!"

Hubbard turned toward him, his head and neck moving with the deliberate precision of a piece of clockwork. "It makes very good sense, Jan. I realized that I could find out nothing more from the stars, so I turned my researches back to Earth. I've been investigating Mr. Dyall."

"What did you find?" Emrys asked tensely. Why did Peter call him by his former name in front of his former enemy? Had the old fool forgotten his promise, or had he broken it on purpose? *"What did you find out?"* he repeated.

Hubbard's voice was filled with pity. "Just this: Nicholas Dyall never did marry Alissa Embel."

Emrys' fear exploded into a scarlet rage. "Then Megan is—" He advanced on Dyall, his fists clenched. "If you took Alissa and then didn't—"

Hubbard caught his arm in a frail grip. "Don't be so hasty, Emrys. Dyall did no wrong to Alissa Embel, whatever wrong he may have done to you."

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"Thank you," Dyall murmured, "for granting me that. I gave her all I had, but it wasn't what she wanted. She wanted—" his old eyes were filled with hate as he looked at Emrys—"you."

"Alissa Embel killed herself on the day before the wedding," Hubbard told Emrys. "She, as we attorneys say, died without issue."

EMRYS was glad that, since he could not have had Alissa, Dyall had not, either. At the same time, he felt an overwhelmingly poignant sense of sorrow, that he should have had three full lifetimes, and the woman he had loved —insofar as Jan Shortmire had been capable of love — not even one.

He raised dull eyes to the two old men. "Then who is Megan?"

Hubbard hesitated. But what worse could there be to tell? And then the lawyer asked a ridiculous question, "Jan, do you know why Dyall's machines didn't meet popular favor until he changed them?"

Emrys plunged back once again into the well of his memories. "Nobody wanted to buy machines that looked too much like people; it made them . . . uncomfortable. So Dyall stopped designing robots and made machines adapted to their separate functions and—" His voice became a cry of anguish. *"Megan!"*

She turned her bland, smiling doll face toward him. "I'm sorry, Emrys," the sweet voice said.

Dyall's eyes were squeezed shut and something glistened on the edge of them—something that Emrys would not admit were tears, because he himself could never cry.

"When Alissa died," Dyall said, "I knew I couldn't love another woman. So I made a mechanical doll in her image. I made her the woman every man dreams of — lovely and sympathetic and undemanding. And I told myself she would be better than the original Alissa because she would be perfect, and Alissa wasn't; she would stay young forever, while the real Alissa would have grown old . . . if she had lived. But it wasn't the same for me."

Why was she the same for me, then? Emrys wondered bitterly. *Was it because I didn't know? Is that all love is — self-deception?*

"Perhaps," Dyall went on, "Man cannot appreciate true perfection; perhaps he's not good enough himself. Still, she was company of a sort and so I kept her by me. And then, when I read of Emrys Shortmire's arrival on Earth, I sent him a note, but he didn't answer; however, I contrived to get a look at him anyway. Then I knew for sure that he was Jan Shortmire himself; and then I knew what Megan's destiny was . . ."

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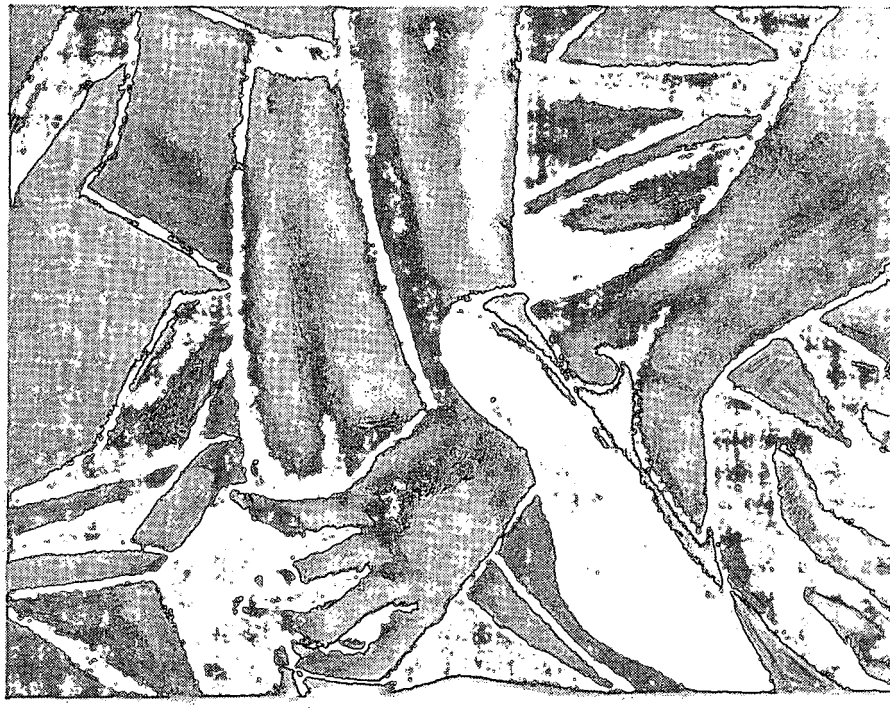

"How *could* you know he — I was Jan Shortmire?" Emrys demanded angrily. It was insupportable that old Dyall should have known all along; it spoiled the joke. "Where would you have — have gotten the concept?"

The old man smiled, opening his eyes. "Because the Morethans made me the same offer they did you! Did you think you were the only one?" And, throwing back his head, he derisively began to laugh aloud.

MORE than ever, Emrys hated the Morethans, not for what they would do to Earth's pride, but for what they had done to his. Because now there was nothing that he had been offered that Dyall had not been offered also. And Dyall had not accepted the Morethans' offer, thereby proving himself the better man. And Dyall had tricked him, thereby proving himself the cleverer man. And Dyall had hated him even more than he had hated Dyall, thereby

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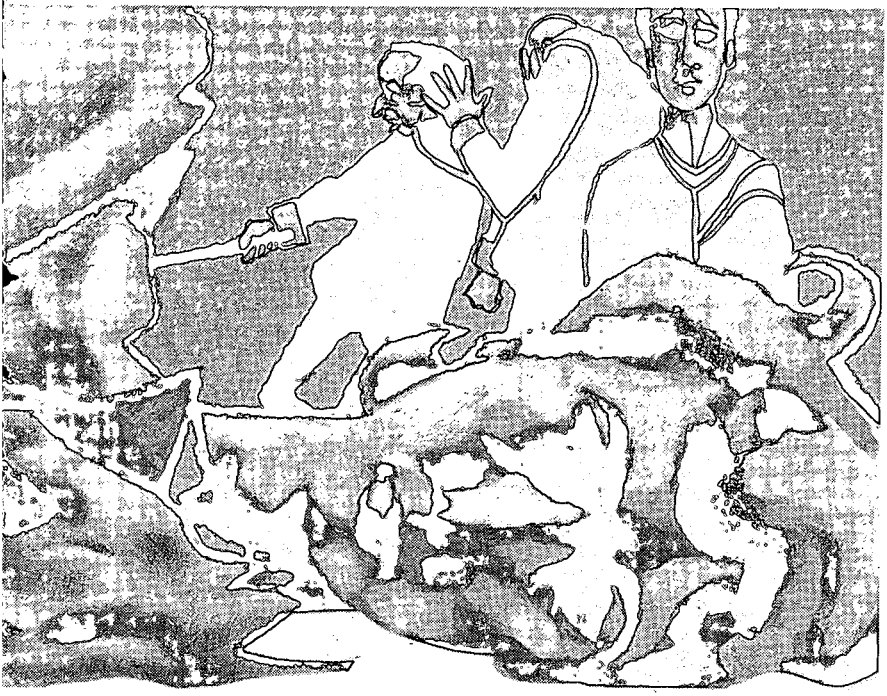

proving himself the more constant man. So there Emrys Shortmire, Jan Shortmire, was left . . . with nothing but a youthfulness of which, he had to admit to himself, he had grown rather tired.

"I'm sorry, Emrys," Megan said. "I'm terribly sorry."

Dyall sprang from his chair. "I'm sick of that piping doll's voice of yours! I've stood it for a century, and that's long enough!" Raising his stick high in the air, he crashed it down upon the golden head, the pretty pink and white face. And, frozen in horror, Emrys could not move until it was too late. He had not conceived old Dyall capable of committing outright murder so wantonly. Probably he wasn't; to him, Megan was and had been always a doll.

And now she was a heap of broken wheels and gears on the thick rug. Still, out of the heap of twisted machinery, a tiny, tinny voice kept repeating "I'm sorry, Emrys. I'm terribly sorry."

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Exhausted by his effort, Dyall sank back into his chair. And he laughed as Emrys, wanting desperately to weep, unable to, bent over the pieces, trying to fit them together again.

"You'll never do it, Jan," he croaked maliciously. "Even a good engineer would never be able to repair it now. If I know how to create, I also know how to destroy!" And he went into another paroxysm of gleefully triumphant laughter.

Emrys saw that Megan was indeed far beyond his powers, and probably old Dyall's, to repair. Filled with fury — the one emotion, he saw now, that he had not given up — he turned to smash Nicholas Dyall as Dyall had smashed his doll. But the old, old man sat perfectly still in his chair. There was a broad grin on his face.

He made a very cheerful corpse.

VIII

EMRYS Shortmire found that he did not want life any more. He went back to his mansion and he tried to hang himself. But the rope would not cut off his breath. He pointed a ray gun at his head, and although the heat became intolerable, it did not burn him. He swallowed poison and waited. Nothing happened. He threw himself off the roof and landed unhurt upon the pavement below. He went back inside and slashed his writst and saw the cuts close before his eyes. And as he stared at the unmarked skin, thick fog filled the room, and he heard Uvrei's voice — and it was the greatest ignominy of all that the More-than's voice should *dare* to hold compassion.

"Don't you know, Emrys, that an immortal cannot die?"

When Emrys forced himself to look at the ancient one, he saw that the beautiful eyes were filled with an unhallowed pity. "You are an immortal god, son of my spirit. You can destroy anything except one of us — and you *are* one of us now."

"I'm not one of you. I'm not a god, nor are you. I'm not . . ." Emrys looked down at his wrists, then back at Uvrei. "But I may be immortal," he acknowledged. "It wasn't just a figure of speech?"

"You will never die, Emrys. You will exist forever, like us, a handful of changelessness in a changing universe."

"Then I *won't* be dead when you come to Earth?" He had fancied himself out of it, but what exquisite punishment that not until he had tired of life had he found out he was cursed with unwanted life forever. He had not been a good man, but was any man evil enough to deserve this?

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"When we come to Earth, you will be waiting for us. But you will look forward to our coming." And Uvrei said once again, "You are one of us, Emrys."

"I'm not! I'm *not!*"

"Of course you are. Like us, you do not breathe air—"

"I do . . ." And then Emrys remembered that the rope had not cut off his breath, and it might well have been because he had not been breathing.

"Like us, you do not eat food."

"But I do!" And here Emrys was genuinely perplexed.

"We left you your digestive system, because part of the pleasure you craved comes through that. But you could completely deny yourself the food that you thought sustained you and feel no ill effects — at least no physical ones. It's the pills that feed you, Emrys."

"Well," Emrys said slowly, "they're food, then."

"Of a sort. But not the kind you mean. You cannot exist without us and our skills, Emrys. Each vial of pills consists of the mitogenetic force of ten tons of life."

"What kind of life?" Emrys asked.

"Does it really matter?"

"You said I cannot exist without you," Emrys pointed out shrewdly, "that I need the pills. So I could stop taking them, couldn't I, and starve myself to death?"

UVREI smiled. "Yes, you could do that. Only it would take, say, about fifteen hundred terrestrial years — perhaps, since we have given you a strong, young body, as much as two thousand. Do you think you are strong enough to starve yourself to death over a period of two thousand years?"

Emrys knew he was not. In that first anguish, all he could think of to do was to humble himself before the Morethan. "I have served your purpose. Why not be merciful to me now?" he pleaded. "At least let me die."

"I could not, even if I would. So little of our old powers remain. We have kept the secret of perpetual life, but we have lost the secret of perpetual death."

"But that's the greater secret!"

"Of course it is!" For the first time, Emrys saw the Morethan high priest lose control. "Do you think I don't know what it is to crave death?"

After a silence, the voice, once more chillingly warm, said, "Come, my son, being one of us, you have nothing to fear from our arrival. You no longer have anything in common with these animals. You cannot even — what is your word? — love them. When you tried, you fixed upon a machine with the face of a memory."

"Would a human being have known she was a machine?"

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"A human being would have known."

"Then . . . I am a machine, too? A machine created by mental, rather than physical processes, but a machine nonetheless?"

"In a sense," the alien said thoughtfully, "you could be called that – though to compare you, as an artistic creation, with that trumpery piece of gimcrack . . ."

"Don't call her that!" Emrys shouted. "She's dead!"

Uvrei began to laugh quietly. After a little, Emrys began to laugh, too. "I'm being foolish," he said.

"Extremely foolish," Uvrei agreed. "Resign yourself, my son, and accept your fate. That is what we immortals have all had to do, one by one."

Of course he could do that, Emrys thought. After all, he wouldn't be as badly off as the other Earth people when the Morethans came; whatever else happened, he, at least, could not be turned into a component part of a little golden pill. Immortality was a dull future, but perhaps, after the Morethans arrived, it would become more interesting.

"Good-by, son of my spirit," Uvrei said. "We shall meet again corporeally in a few centuries." The fog thickened about him and disappeared, leaving its characteristic odor behind.

And still Emrys could not resign himself. *Dyall could have had this, too, if he had wanted it. This was what he was offered and what he was strong enough to refuse. If I accept my fate, then I will always know that I have come off second best to him.* And this prospect, more than immortality, more than the knowledge of what would happen to Earth and its people, was the one that Emrys found intolerable.

IX

WHY doesn't he leave me alone? Peter Hubbard thought, as, wearily, he told the Dyall machine to let Emrys Shortmire up. *I am a very old man and I will die soon. Can't he leave me alone in the little time left?*

But he could not forget the obligations of courtesy. He was polite to Emrys Shortmire when the other man came in. Even if he hadn't been, he saw, Emrys wouldn't have noticed; he was too full of his own thoughts.

"Peter," he cried, almost before he was fully in the room, "did you know that, in dying, Nicholas Dyall won a final victory over me?"

The old man muffled a yawn. "You mean you can't die? Well, I was afraid of that. I am sorry

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for you, Jan, but you brought this upon yourself."

"I know," Emrys said, looking a little disappointed that the knowledge did not startle the lawyer. "I will be alive when they come," he went on, more subdued. "I will be waiting, or so they think."

"I imagine that's what they counted on," Hubbard said indifferently. "You not only giving them the secret of the engines but acting as a — an outpost. They didn't sell their wares cheap, did they?"

Emrys' eyes flashed copper fire. "But I will *not* be waiting to help them. I will be waiting to *fight* them."

"Brave words."

"You think I can't fight them?"

"Of course you can't. They have powers far beyond yours. And why should you want to fight them? I know you hadn't planned to be alive when they came, but it won't be bad for you. You're one of them now."

Emrys sat down on the couch. "Physically I am. That's why I *can* fight them. Look, Peter, I have centuries ahead of me. By giving me immortality, they have also given me time."

"Splendid. Time to do what?"

"I don't know," Emrys confessed. "But time is such a valuable commodity in itself. With it, I could learn how to turn their own powers against them."

"Easier said than done," Hubbard observed.

"Maybe I could — oh — invent a machine that will amplify my mind powers until it can overcome all of theirs . . ."

Hubbard said nothing.

"Well, then, the engines I gave them can't take them out of this galaxy any more than those same engines can take humanity out of it. But, given time, I can invent *new* engines, Peter — engines that can jump the gap from galaxy to galaxy. If I cannot give Man the weapons with which to fight, at least I can give him the means by which to flee! And, since I was the man who invented the one, I can be the man to invent the other!"

THAT was true, Hubbard thought, hope rising in him, despite all his efforts to hold it back. That was possible. But would Emrys do this? Right now, in the first flush of repentance, he might try to. But if the work grew tedious, might he not say to himself: *Why bother? I'm bound to live forever, anyway. Why should I care what happens to the others of my kind?*

"Who knows, Peter," Emrys cried, "I may be able to invent engines that can move the whole world — all our worlds — to another galaxy, where the Morethans will never be able to follow!"

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"What's in it for you, Emrys?" Hubbard asked bluntly.

"I want to save humanity . . . and, of course," Emrys added, his eyes lighting exultantly, "by doing that, I will do more than Dyall ever did. My name will go down in history, and his—"

"Do you hate him so much, Emrys, even though he's dead?" Hubbard asked wonderingly, unable to conceive of such a thing.

"*Especially* because he's dead," Emrys snarled. "Because now I'll never have the pleasure of mocking him." He looked anxiously at Hubbard. "Don't you think I'm doing the right thing, Peter?"

The right thing, but for the wrong reason. Only for the wrong reason, though, was Emrys sure to finish what he had set out to do. It was the one motive that would keep him working long after he grew bored with the work. It was humanity's only chance, and so it did not matter *why* Emrys was doing this.

"It's a splendid thing you're planning to do, Emrys," Hubbard said warmly. "A splendid thing!"

What if Emrys *did* go down in history? It would be thanks to him that history had continued at all.

YES, he was a vicious man. And Dyall had been equally vicious. And Peter Hubbard was a good man — and it was he who had *not* been granted that fifty extra years of life. What was goodness? Was it inherently opposed to greatness? Did things get done only out of malevolent motives — anger and ruthlessness and spite? If, as it seemed, goodness was a passive force, and evil an active one, perhaps the world needed both. And if, as it seemed, evil could beget good, then evil could not be all bad.

So, Peter Hubbard thought, *there is hope for the Morethans as well as for humanity.*

— CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

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or all the seas with oysters

By AVRAM DAVIDSON

Was another explanation the right one — that he worried too much about the good of humanity for his own good?

Illustrated by FRIEDMAN

WHEN the man came in to the F & O Bike Shop, Oscar greeted him with a hearty "Hi, there!" Then, as he looked closer at the middle-aged visitor with the eyeglasses and business suit, his forehead creased and he began to snap his thick fingers.

"Oh, say, I know you," he muttered. "Mr. — um — name's on the tip of my tongue, doggone it . . ." Oscar was a barrel-chested fellow. He had orange hair.

"Why, sure you do," the man said. There was a Lion's emblem in his lapel. "Remember, you sold me a girl's bicycle with gears, for my daughter? We got to talking about that red French racing bike your partner was working on—"

Oscar slapped his big hand down on the cash register. He raised his

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head and rolled his eyes up. "Mr. Whatney!" Mr. Whatney beamed. "Oh, *sure*. Gee, how could I forget? And we went across the street afterward and had a couple a beers. Well, how you *been*, Mr. Whatney? I guess the bike—it was an English model, wasn't it? Yeah. It must of given satisfaction or you would of been back, huh?"

Mr. Whatney said the bicycle was fine, just fine. Then he said, "I understand there's been a change, though. You're all by yourself now. Your partner . . ."

Oscar looked down, pushed his lower lip out, nodded. "You heard, huh? Ee-up. I'm all by myself now. Over three months now."

THE partnership had come to an end three months ago, but it had been faltering long before then. Ferd liked books, long-playing records and high-level conversation. Oscar liked beer, bowling and women. Any women. Any time.

The shop was located near the park; it did a big trade in renting bicycles to picnickers. If a woman was barely old enough to be *called* a woman, and not quite old enough to be called an *old* woman, or if she was anywhere in between, and if she was alone, Oscar would ask, "How does that machine feel to you? All right?"

"Why . . . I guess so."

Taking another bicycle, Oscar would say, "Well, I'll just ride along a little bit with you, to make sure. Be right back, Ferd." Ferd always nodded gloomily. He knew that Oscar would not be right back. Later, Oscar would say, "Hope you made out in the shop as good as I did in the park."

"Leaving me all alone here all that time," Ferd grumbled.

And Oscar usually flared up. "Okay, then, next time *you* go and leave *me* stay here. See if I begrudge you a little fun." But he knew, of course, that Ferd — tall, thin, pop-eyed Ferd — would never go. "Do you good," Oscar said, slapping his sternum. "Put hair on your chest."

Ferd muttered that he had all the hair on his chest that he needed. He would glance down covertly at his lower arms; they were thick with long black hair, though his upper arms were slick and white. It was already like that when he was in high school, and some of the others would laugh at him — call him "Ferdie the Birdie." They knew it bothered him, but they did it anyway. How was it possible — he wondered then; he still did now — for people deliberately to hurt someone else who hadn't hurt them? How was it possible?

He worried over other things. All the time.

"The Communists—" He shook his head over the newspaper. Os-

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car offered an advice about the Communists in two short words. Or it might be capital punishment. "Oh, what a terrible thing if an innocent man was to be executed," Ferd moaned. Oscar said that was the guy's tough luck.

"Hand me that tire-iron," Oscar said.

And Ferd worried even about other people's minor concerns. Like the time the couple came in with the tandem and the baby-basket on it. Free air was all they took; then the woman decided to change the diaper and one of the safety pins broke.

"Why are there never any safety pins?" the woman fretted, rummaging here and rummaging there. "There are *never* any safety pins."

Ferd made sympathetic noises, went to see if he had any; but, though he was sure there'd been some in the office, he couldn't find them. So they drove off with one side of the diaper tied in a clumsy knot.

AT lunch, Ferd said it was too bad about the safety pins. Oscar dug his teeth into a sandwich, tugged, tore, chewed, swallowed. Ferd liked to experiment with sandwich spreads — the one he liked most was cream-cheese, olives, anchovy and avocado, mashed up with a little mayonnaise — but Oscar always had the same pink luncheon-meat.

"It must be difficult with a baby." Ferd nibbled. "Not just traveling, but raising it."

Oscar said, "Jeez, there's drugstores in every block, and if you can't read, you can at least reckernize them."

"Drugstores? Oh, to buy safety pins, you mean."

"Yeah. Safety pins."

"But . . . you know . . . it's true . . . there's never any safety pins when you look."

Oscar uncapped his beer, rinsed the first mouthful around. "Aha! Always plenny of clothes hangers, though. Throw 'em out every month, next month same closet's full of 'm again. Now whatcha wanna do in your spare time, you invent a device which it'll make safety pins outa clothes hangers."

Ferd nodded abstractedly. "But in my spare time I'm working on the French racer . . ." It was a beautiful machine, light, low-slung, swift, red and shining. You felt like a bird when you rode it. But, good as it was, Ferd knew he could make it better. He showed it to everybody who came in the place until his interest slackened.

Nature was his latest hobby, or, rather, reading about Nature. Some kids had wandered by from the park one day with tin cans in which they had put salamanders and toads, and they proudly showed them to Ferd. After that, the work on the red racer slowed

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down and he spent his spare time on natural history books.

"Mimicry!" he cried to Oscar. "A wonderful thing!"

Oscar looked up interestedly from the bowling scores in the paper. "I seen Edie Adams on TV the other night, doing her imitation of Marilyn Monroe. Boy, oh, boy."

Ferd was irritated, shook his head. "Not that kind of mimicry. I mean how insects and arachnids will mimic the shapes of leaves and twigs and so on, to escape being eaten by birds or other insects and arachnids."

A scowl of disbelief passed over Oscar's heavy face. "You mean they change their *shapes?* What you giving me?"

"Oh, it's true. Sometimes the mimicry is for aggressive purposes, though—like a South African turtle that looks like a rock and so the fish swim up to it and then it catches them. Or that spider in Sumatra. When it lies on its back, it looks like a bird dropping. Catches butterflies that way."

OSCAR laughed, a disgusted and incredulous noise. It died away as he turned back to the bowling scores. One hand groped at his pocket, came away, scratched absently at the orange thicket under the shirt, then went patting his hip pocket.

"Where's that pencil?" he muttered, got up, stomped into the office, pulled open drawers. His loud cry of "Hey!" brought Ferd into the tiny room.

"What's the matter?" Ferd asked.

Oscar pointed to a drawer. "Remember that time you claimed there were no safety pins here? Look — whole gahdamn drawer is full of 'em."

Ferd stared, scratched his head, said feebly that he was certain he'd looked there before . . .

A contralto voice from outside asked, "Anybody here?"

Oscar at once forgot the desk and its contents, called, "Be right with you," and was gone. Ferd followed him slowly.

There was a young woman in the shop, a rather massively built young woman, with muscular calves and a deep chest. She was pointing out the seat of her bicycle to Oscar, who was saying "Uh-huh" and looking more at her than at anything else. "It's just a little too far forward ("Uh-huh"), as you can see. A wrench is all I need ("Uh-huh"). It was silly of me to forget my tools."

Oscar repeated, "Uh-huh" automatically, then snapped to. "Fix it in a jiffy," he said, and — despite her insistence that she could do it herself — he did fix it. Though not quite in a jiffy. He refused money. He prolonged the conversation as long as he could.

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"Well, thank *you,*" the young woman said. "And now I've got to go."

"That machine feel all right to you now?"

"Perfectly. Thanks—"

"Tell you what, I'll just ride along with you a little bit, just—"

Pear-shaped notes of laughter lifted the young woman's bosom. "Oh, you couldn't keep up with me! My machine is a *racer!*"

The moment he saw Oscar's eye flit to the corner, Ferd knew what he had in mind. He stepped forward. His cry of "No" was drowned out by his partner's loud, "Well, I guess this racer here can keep up with yours!"

The young woman giggled richly, said, well, they would see about that, and was off. Oscar, ignoring Ferd's outstretched hand, jumped on the French bike and was gone. Ferd stood in the doorway, watching the two figures, hunched over their handlebars, vanish down the road into the park. He went slowly back inside.

IT was almost evening before Oscar returned, sweaty but smiling. Smiling broadly. "Hey, what a babe!" he cried. He wagged his head, he whistled, he made gestures, noises like escaping steam. "Boy, oh, boy, what an afternoon!"

"Give me the bike," Ferd demanded.

Oscar said, yeah, sure; turned it over to him and went to wash. Ferd looked at the machine. The red enamel was covered with dust; there was mud spattered and dirt and bits of dried grass. It seemed soiled — degraded. He had felt like a swift bird when he rode it...

Oscar came out wet and beaming. He gave a cry of dismay, ran over.

"Stand away," said Ferd, gesturing with the knife. He slashed the tires, the seat and seat cover, again and again.

"You crazy?" Oscar yelled. "You outa your mind? Ferd, no, don't, Ferd—"

Ferd cut the spokes, bent them, twisted them. He took the heaviest hammer and pounded the frame into shapelessness, and then he kept on pounding till his breath was gasping.

"You're not only crazy," Oscar said bitterly, "you're rotten jealous. You can go to hell." He stomped away.

Ferd, feeling sick and stiff, locked up, went slowly home. He had no taste for reading, turned out the light and fell into bed. where he lay awake for hours, listening to the rustling noises of the night and thinking hot, twisted thoughts.

They didn't speak to each other for days after that, except for the necessities of the work. The wreckage of the French racer lay behind the shop. For about two weeks,

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neither wanted to go out back where he'd have to see it.

One morning Ferd arrived to be greeted by his partner, who began to shake his head in astonishment even before he started speaking. "How did you *do* it, how did you *do* it, Ferd? Jeez, what a beautiful job — I gotta hand it to you — no more hard feelings, huh, Ferd?"

Ferd took his hand. "Sure, sure. But what are you talking about?"

Oscar led him out back. There was the red racer, all in one piece, not a mark or scratch on it, its enamel bright as ever. Ferd gaped. He squatted down and examined it. It *was* his machine. Every change, every improvement he had made, was there.

He straightened up slowly. "Regeneration . . ."

"Huh? What say?" Oscar asked. Then, "Hey, kiddo, you're all white. Whad you do, stay up all night and didn't get no sleep? Come on in and siddown. But I still don't see how you done it."

Inside, Ferd sat down. He wet his lips. He said, "Oscar—listen—"

"Yeah?"

"Oscar. You know what regeneration is? No? Listen. Some kinds of lizards, you grab them by the tail, the tail breaks off and they grow a new one. If a lobster loses a claw, it regenerates another one. Some kinds of worms—and hydras and starfish — you cut them into pieces, each piece will grow back the missing parts. Salamanders can regenerate lost hands, and frogs can grow legs back."

"No kidding, Ferd. But, uh, I mean: Nature. Very interesting. But to get back to the bike now—how'd you manage to fix it so good?"

"I never touched it. It regenerated. Like a newt. Or a lobster."

OSCAR considered this. He lowered his head, looked up at Ferd from under his eyebrows. "Well, now, Ferd . . . Look . . . How come all broke bikes don't do that?"

"This isn't an ordinary bike. I mean it isn't a real bike." Catching Oscar's look, he shouted, "Well, it's *true!*"

The shout changed Oscar's attitude from bafflement to incredulity. He got up. "So for the sake of argument, let's say all that stuff about the bugs and the eels or whatever the hell you were talking about is true. But they're alive. A bike ain't." He looked down triumphantly.

Ferd shook his leg from side to side, looked at it. "A crystal isn't, either, but a broken crystal can regenerate itself if the conditions are right. Oscar, go see if the safety pins are still in the desk. Please, Oscar?"

He listened as Oscar, muttering, pulled the desk drawers out, rum-

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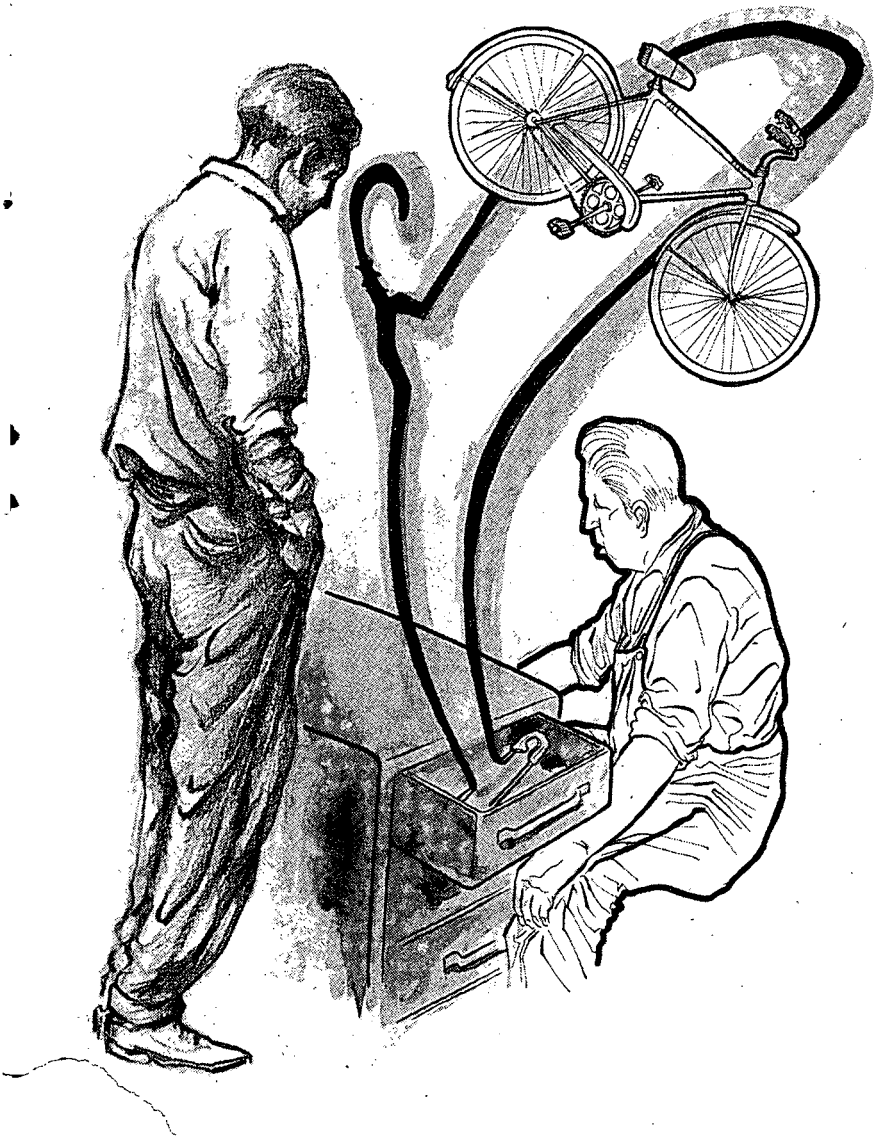

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maged in them, slammed them shut, tramped back.

"Naa," he said. "All gone. Like that lady said that time, and you said, there never are any safety pins when you want 'em. They disap – Ferd? What're—"

Ferd jerked open the closet door, jumped back as a shoal of clothes hangers clattered out.

"And like *you* say," Ferd said with a twist of his mouth, "on the other hand, there are always plenty of clothes hangers. There weren't any here before."

Oscar shrugged. "I don't see what you're getting at. But anybody could of got in here and took the pins and left the hangers. *I* could of – but I didn't. Or *you* could of. Maybe –" He narrowed his eyes. "Maybe you walked in your sleep and done it. You better see a doctor. Jeez, you look rotten."

Ferd went back and sat down, put his head in his hands. "I *feel* rotten. I'm scared, Oscar. Scared of what?" He breathed noisily. "I'll tell you. Like I explained before, about how things that live in the wild places, they mimic other things there. Twigs, leaves . . . toads that look like rocks. Well, suppose there are . . . things . . . that live in people places. Cities. Houses. These things could imitate —well, other kinds of things you find in people places—"

"*People* places, for crise sake!"

"Maybe they're a different kind of life-form. Maybe they get their nourishment out of the elements in the air. You know what safety pins *are* – these other kinds of them? Oscar, the safety pins are the pupa-forms and then they, like, *hatch*. Into the larval-forms. Which look just like coat hangers. They feel like them, even, but they're not. Oscar, they're not, not really, not really, not . . ."

He began to cry into his hands. Oscar looked at him. He shook his head.

After a minute, Ferd controlled himself somewhat. He snuffled. "All these bicycles the cops find, and they hold them waiting for owners to show up, and then we buy them at the sale because no owners show up because there aren't any, and the same with the ones the kids are always trying to sell us, and they say they just found them, and they really did because they were never made in a factory. They grew. They grow. You smash them and throw them away, they regenerate."

Oscar turned to someone who wasn't there and waggled his head. "Hoo, boy," he said. Then, to Ferd: "You mean one day there's a safety pin and the next day instead there's a coat hanger?"

FERD said, "One day there's a cocoon; the next day there's a moth. One day there's an egg; the

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next day there's a chicken. But with . . .these it doesn't happen in the open daytime where you can see it. But at night, Oscar — at night you can *hear* it happening. All the little noises in the nighttime, Oscar—"

Oscar said, "Then how come we ain't up to our belly-button in bikes? If I had a bike for every coat hanger—"

But Ferd had considered that, too. If every codfish egg, he explained, or every oyster spawn grew to maturity, a man could walk across the ocean on the backs of all the codfish or oysters there'd be. So many died, so many were eaten by predatory creatures, that Nature had to produce a maximum in order to allow a minimum to arrive at maturity. And Oscar's question was: then who, uh, eats the, uh, coat hangers?

Ferd's eyes focused through wall, buildings, park, more buildings, to the horizon. "You got to get the picture. I'm not talking about real pins or hangers. I got a name for the others—'false friends,' I call them. In high school French, we had to watch out for French words that looked like English words, but really were different. *'Faux amis,'* they call them. False friends. Pseudo-pins. Pseudo-hangers . . . Who eats them? I don't know for sure. Pseudo-vacuum cleaners, maybe?"

His partner, with a loud groan, slapped his hands against his thighs. He said, "Ferd, Ferd, for crise sake. You know what's the trouble with you? You talk about oysters, but you forgot what they're good for. You forgot there's two kinds of people in the world. Close up them books, them bug books and French books. Get out, mingle, meet people. Soak up some brew. You know what? The next time Norma — that's this broad's name with the racing bike — the next time she comes here, *you* take the red racer and *you* go out in the woods with her. I won't mind. And I don't think she will, either. Not *too* much."

But Ferd said no. "I never want to touch the red racer again. I'm afraid of it."

At this, Oscar pulled him to his feet, dragged him protestingly out to the back and forced him to get on the French machine. "Only way to conquer your fear of it!"

Ferd started off, white-faced, wobbling. And in a moment was on the ground, rolling and thrashing, screaming.

Oscar pulled him away from the machine.

"It threw me!" Ferd yelled. "It tried to kill me! Look — blood!"

His partner said it was a bump that threw him — it was his own fear. The blood? A broken spoke. Grazed his cheek. And he insisted Ferd get on the bicycle again, to conquer his fear.

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But Ferd had grown hysterical. He shouted that no man was safe—that mankind had to be warned. It took Oscar a long time to pacify him and to get him to go home and into bed.

HE didn't tell all this to Mr. Whatney, of course. He merely said that his partner had gotten fed up with the bicycle business.

"It don't pay to worry and try to change the world," he pointed out. "I always say take things the way they are. If you can't lick 'em, join 'em."

Mr. Whatney said that was his philosophy, exactly. He asked how things were, since.

"Well . . . not *too* bad. I'm engaged, you know. Name's Norma. Crazy about bicycles. Everything considered, things aren't bad at all. More work, yes, but I can do things all my own way, so . . .

Mr. Whatney nodded. He glanced around the shop. "I see they're still making drop-frame bikes," he said, "though, with so many women wearing slacks, I wonder they bother."

Oscar said, "Well, I dunno. I kinda like it that way. Ever stop to think that bicycles are like people? I mean, of all the machines in the world, only bikes come male and female."

Mr. Whatney gave a little giggle, said that was *right,* he had never thought of it like that before. Then Oscar asked if Mr. Whatney had anything in particular in mind—not that he wasn't always welcome.

"Well, I wanted to look over what you've got. My boy's birthday is coming up—"

Oscar nodded sagely. "Now here's a job," he said, "which you can't get it in any other place but here. Specialty of the house. Combines the best features of the French racer and the American standard, but it's made right here, and it comes in three models — Junior, Intermediate and Regular. Beautiful, ain't it?"

Mr. Whatney observed that, say, that might be just the ticket. "By the way," he asked, "what's become of the French racer, the red one, used to be here?"

Oscar's face twitched. Then it grew bland and innocent and he leaned over and nudged his customer. "Oh, *that* one. Old Frenchy? Why, I put *him* out to stud!"

And they laughed and they laughed, and after they told a few more stories they concluded the sale, and they had a few beers and they laughed some more. And then they said what a shame it was about poor Ferd, poor old Ferd, who had been found in his own closet with an unraveled coat hanger coiled tightly around his neck.

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

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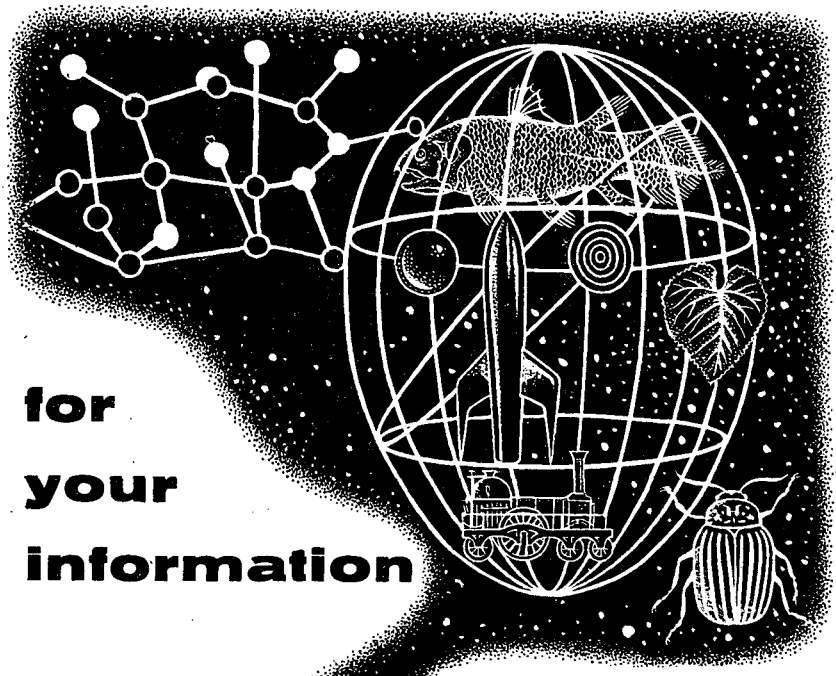

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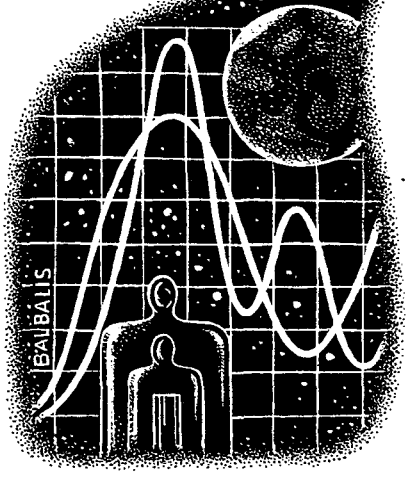

Remnants of the Sarmatian Sea

BY WILLY LEY

SINCE this piece is going to deal with a distant place as well as, intermittently, a distant past, it might as well begin in the past and with the description of a voyage. I cannot lay my hands on an authentic document for this

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voyage—although it has been made repeatedly—and I therefore imagine a Roman traveler of about 200 B.C. sitting on a terrace of his villa on a hilltop some distance from Rome. Shivering a little in an entirely unseasonal wind, he dictates to his scribe:

"Cnossus on Creta was directly to the south of us when we shifted to a northern course to wend our way through the channels between the Cyclades into Aegaeum Mare. Turning east again when Lemnos came into sight, we entered the Hellespontus and, after traversing the Propontis, turned north into the narrow Bosporus Thracicus, where the opposing current is strong. Once we had gained the open waters of the Pontus Euxinus, we had a smooth if long voyage and finally found the entrance to Maeotis palus, which entrance some call the Bosporus cimmericus. Maeotis palus is not a swamp (*palus*) but again open water, if shallow. The climate was warm and pleasing as one might have it in Sicilia.

"Then we found the mouth of the river Tanais and sailed upstream. But after a two-day journey on the Tanais, we had to leave our vessel and had to proceed overland to reach the mighty Oarus, which makes a big bend there. In a small village at the bend, we found a barbarian who could speak some Greek and who told us that the sea to the south of us could best be reached by building a raft such as Odysseus used when leaving Kalypso's island, and by simply drifting down the Oarus until we reached its delta and through it, with luck, the Mare Caspium . . ."

THE description is not at all strange. I have merely used the geographical names of the period. The Propontis is our Sea of Marmara, the Pontus Euxinus is the Black Sea, the Bosporus cimmericus is the Strait of Kertch, and the Maeotis palus the Sea of Azov. The Tanais is obviously the Don and the Oarus the Volga. The Mare Caspium is still the Caspian Sea in any language and it is, now as then, the largest land-locked body of water. It is also something that worries the Russians. The reason why it worries the Russians is far in the past, in a past far beyond Romans and Greeks and Scythians. It is in the geologic past.

A fair number of millions of years ago, before the Alps formed, Europe was bounded in the south — and separated from Africa — by a large sea.

The description sounds as if our current Mediterranean Sea were meant, but this was a far bigger sea. It covered the area now covered by the Mediterranean Sea, but in the north it covered land

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even beyond the present-day Alps. In the east, it made a straight connection with the Indian Ocean. Geologists call it the Tethys Sea; it had been there much longer than even the oldest mammals. It had been there in the days of the Saurians; in fact, it had been a fixture on the face of the Earth for literally hundreds of millions of years.

It probably was fairly shallow in great stretches of the area it covered. But it was there; we can read its former existence from the fossils of marine life it left behind. It formed an uninterrupted waterway from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean until about the middle of the Tertiary Period, say twenty million years ago.

The growing Alps at first formed just an island in the Tethys Sea, but in the east the connection to the Indian Ocean was broken. For a while, several million years, Africa and Asia were firmly connected by a land bridge 1200 miles wide, the land bridge we now call Arabia. Only at a later date did an enormous valley open in that land connection, the Great Rift Valley which in its northern portion forms the Valley of the Jordan, which farther south is flooded to form the Red Sea and which, still farther south, is the reason for Africa's "long lakes" — Albert, Edward, Kivu, Tanganyika and Nyasa.

In the north, the Tethys broke up into several big "seas." One we now call the western Mediterranean. The eastern Mediterranean was a smaller and separate sea, and still farther to the east there was one which no longer exists as a unit. It was the Sarmatian Sea (Fig. 1) which unified the present Black Sea with the present Caspian Sea and the present Lake Aral over 200 miles to the east of the Caspian Sea.

But the Sarmatian Sea extended much farther to the north than any of its three remnants of today. It also extended much farther to the west. There is evidence that the Hungarian plain was once covered by the waters of the Sarmatian Sea. But since much of it must have been shallow, there obviously were large-scale fluctuations in its extent.

It must have been rather similar to the performance of present Lake Tchad in Africa — also the remnant of a former much larger "sea" — for which every survey gives a different area. All the surveys are, as far as one can tell, correct. It just depends on how wet the preceding seasons were.

IT is not yet known — although Soviet geologists are probably busy trying to establish this fact — just how the Sarmatian Sea fared during the Ice Age. Actually, we don't even know yet how far

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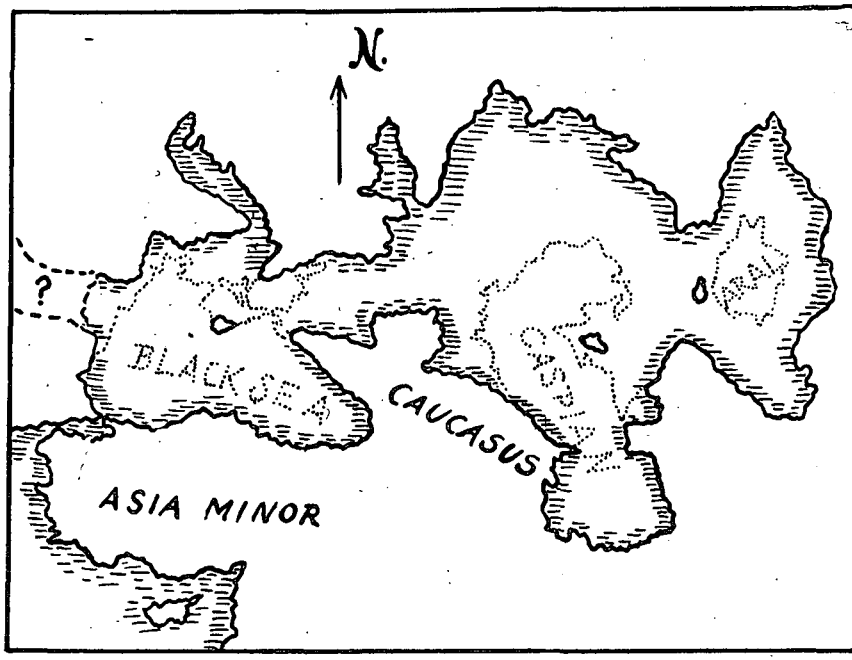

Fig. 1: Probable extent of Sarmatian Sea one million years ago

south the glaciers of the Ice Age—or, better, the Ice Ages — reached in Russia. At any event, the area of the sea must have increased again at the end of the last glaciation, when a lot of the water that had been stored as ice and snow was put back into circulation.

Much of the question on the area of the Sarmatian Sea depends on the time when its western component, the present Black Sea, finally succeeded in breaking through to the Mediterranean.

It has to be mentioned in passing that the Mediterranean Sea is forever losing water. Being a large sea in a warm climate, the water losses of the Mediterranean Sea to evaporation are more than merely astonishing; they are estimated to amount to 5,420,000 *million* cubic yards per year.

Rain over the Mediterranean replaces about 24 per cent of this loss. The rivers that empty themselves into the Mediterranean make up only about 5½ per cent of this. The Atlantic Ocean contributes the main share of compensation for the evaporation losses, nearly 67 per cent. The rest, roughly 3½ per cent, is contributed by the Black Sea.

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The Sarmatian Sea, as a whole, probably disappeared when drainage into the thirsty Mediterranean was accomplished, leaving water in only the three deepest depressions of its area.

Of these three depressions, the westernmost, the Black Sea, is doing relatively well, as can be seen from the fact that it still supplies water to the Mediterranean.

The easternmost of the three, Lake Aral, is also in good shape. With an area of 26,200 square miles, it is slightly larger than Lake Victoria in Africa, which it resembles in shape. Its level is now 158 feet above sea level and its maximum measured depth is 222 feet. Its area seems to have been stable for centuries, its level having risen a little only during the last fifty years.

Of course, if an earthquake opened a chasm in a westerly direction leading to the depression of the Caspian Sea, the lake that would be left would have little resemblance to "blue Lake Aral" of today. The figure of 222 feet which has been mentioned is the maximum measured depth. The average depth is somewhere between 55 and 65 feet; if a drainage to about sea level were opened, very little would be left of it.

BUT if one could say that the Black Sea is "doing well" and that Lake Aral is "getting along" no such statement can be made about the central depression of the old Sarmatian Sea, the Caspian Sea (Fig. 2). It is in a sorry shape and both Nature and Man are combining to make it sorrier still. Its level is by now 96 feet *below* sea level and still sinking.

Even with these handicaps, it is still the largest "lake," if you use that term to denote a body of water not connected with the oceans. If saltiness is the criterion used, the Caspian is a "sea"—the average figure for the whole Caspian reads 6.3 grams of salt per liter of water. (For the Atlantic Ocean, the figure is 35 grams per liter.)

In reality, the "average" saltiness does not apply. In the north, say north of the 45th parallel, the water is drinkable. Logically it is more salty than the average in the south. And the bay of Kara-Bogaz-Gol is a very special [illegible] which needs separate description.

The dimensions of the Caspian are impressive enough — from north to south, it stretches very nearly 800 miles; the widest part measures 275 miles across. The area is about 169,000 square miles; a more precise figure cannot be given, even aside from the perennial question of whether the area of islands in a lake should be counted as lake area or should be subtracted from it.

About two-thirds of the area of

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the Caspian Sea is deeper than 600 feet, and two-thirds of the deep section lie in the southernmost part, to the south of the line from Baku to Krasnovodsk. The third city of noticeable size, in addition to the two just mentioned, is Astrakhan in the north, near the delta of the Volga.

The water supply of the Caspian Sea comes from two major rivers, the Volga and the Ural, and five minor ones, Emba, Kuma, Terek, Kura and Araxel. Of the minor rivers, the Terek looks major in late spring, when it is swollen by the melting snows of the Caucasus. Altogether, they pour 175 cubic miles of water into the Caspian every year — the Volga is Europe's largest river — but this makes up for the losses only in very wet years.

The Caspian, like the Mediterranean, lies in a warm (most of the time) and dry (almost all of the time) climate. Dry winds come from Asia in the east and the evaporation rate is equal to the influx, even though the annual influx represents the volume of Lake Erie.

ONE of the main reasons for the loss is the strange bay, the Kara-Bogaz-Gol. Its area is about 7100 square miles — for comparison: the area of Lake Ontario is 7540 square miles — with a maximum depth of 40 feet and an average depth of about 5 feet.

The channel connecting the bay with the Caspian is roughly one mile in length and not much over 400 feet wide on the average. Through this channel pass 22,000 cubic feet of water per second, to be evaporated in this natural salt pan.

Since the minerals carried into the bay return into the Caspian to the same extent as the water which carried them, namely not at all, the overall result is that the general salinity of the Caspian is kept rather low and that of the bay is fantastic. An estimated 1000 million tons of minerals, impure Epsom salts, to be specific, cover the bottom of the bay, in places to a depth of seven feet.

If this does not sound quite credible, I can add another equally surprising fact: in the bay of Krasnovodsk, just south of the Epsom salts bay, the inhabitants often hunt seals!

In the north, the fisheries are somewhat more on the conservative side. There the fishermen catch salmon, herring and sturgeon. The catch of the latter — 90 per cent of all sturgeon are caught in the Caspian — has a decisive bearing on the caviar trade.

But it is just this caviar corner of the Caspian which is shrinking at a literally visible rate. Most of the small fishing towns are now miles from the shore. And even

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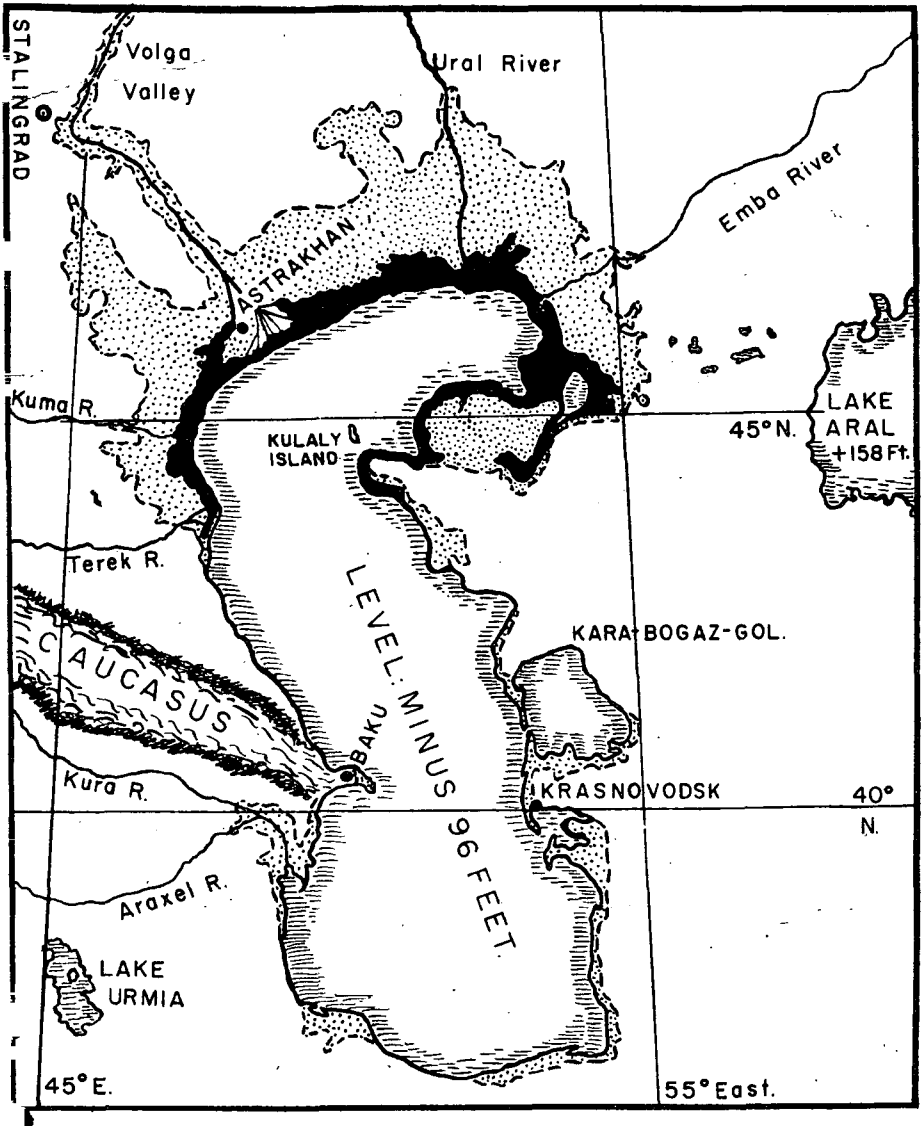

Fig. 2: Caspian Sea. Dotted areas indicate depressions below sea level. Areas in black indicate land dried up during last decade. General shoreline going around outside of black areas is that of 1945

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though each foot of recession produces nearly 100,000 acres of arable land, the overall picture results in a loss. The Soviets say that the Caspian Sea now costs them a billion rubles per year, and they have a truly capitalistic concern about losing money.

Part of the shrinkage is due, strangely enough, to the main water supplier of the Caspian, the Volga. From more than two hundred mouths, the Volga pours about four times as much water into the Caspian Sea as all the other rivers taken together. But with the water come 55 million cubic feet of sediments annually; more, if the spring flood of the Volga was exceptionally high. This makes the northern section, the fishing grounds, more shallow. For many years, steamers were aware of the fact that they had to lighten cargo if they wished to pass the Volga delta at a distance closer than 40 miles.

What makes the 55 million cubic feet of sediment even more deplorable to Russian economists is that a large percentage of it once was good topsoil along the river's course. Whatever good land may be gained from the Caspian's recession had simply been lost elsewhere at an earlier time.

THAT this recession is to some extent man-made is also no consolation. For quite a number of years, the Russians have been building dams along the Volga, partly for regulating the flow of the river itself, partly for the generation of electric current. They have created half a dozen large artificial lakes, all full of Volga water. The largest of them, the artificial lake near Kuibyshev, has an area of 1900 square miles and required all of the spring flood of 1957 to fill it up.

It must be added that the Volga itself, in its lower portion, loses a great deal of water to evaporation, and the artificial lakes, naturally, show evaporation losses too. Even if, when all the power-generating units finally are in operation, the Volga water will finally reach the Caspian Sea, it has to be less than would reach the sea in the time of our fictitious Roman traveler.

The facts about the Caspian Sea are, then, as follows:

Up to 1900, the rate of supply from the rivers, especially the Volga, was not quite enough to make up the evaporation losses. The oldest level of the Caspian Sea in historical times that could be established with reasonable certainty was during the fourteenth century; it was then roughly 50 feet below sea level. This means that in past centuries the drop was 7-8 feet per century.

But, since about 1900, the average temperature of that area has risen by about 2 degrees Fahren-

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heit. This not only meant higher evaporation losses the year round; it also meant less water supply. The Volga lost more water by evaporation before the sea was reached, and other rivers carried less water to begin with, especially the ones from the Caucasus, where the snow line moved up so that there was less snow and ice to melt in spring. Finally, during the last few years, the hydro-electric activities of the Russians have withheld Volga water.

Naturally the Russians are asking themselves what they can do about it. They don't like their annual billion-ruble deficit. One simple and obvious suggestion is, of course, to dam the outlet into the Kara-Bogaz-Gol. It would save 5,184 million cubic feet of water per month. This sounds large, but would not make too much difference as far as the whole body of the Caspian Sea is concerned. In fact, if the inlet is ever dammed up, it would be not to save water, but to facilitate the exploitation of the mineral deposits at the bottom of the bay.

ANOTHER suggestion, made by the oceanographer B. A. Apollov, is not so much concerned with the Caspian Sea as a whole as with the northern portion, which is of economic importance because of the fisheries.

The distance from the mouth of the Kuma River to the island of Kulaly is 280 miles. If one built a dam across the Caspian Sea from the west shore to Kulaly Island, and from the island to a convenient point of the east shore, the valuable northern portion would be separated from the southern portion which is without fisheries of any consequence. The waters coming from the Volga, the Ural, the Emba and the Kuma would then all remain in the northern portion.

This would tend to freshen the water of this section some more, but this would be unimportant in either direction since it is, for most practical purposes, fresh water right now. It would put the fishermen back into their normal occupation. It would avoid expensive dredging for the approaches to the northern ports, especially Astrakhan, which has to go on all the time. And, of course, the dam could have several lock gates in convenient places so that shipping could go on from the north to the south and vice versa.

Apollov's suggestion is not yet a "plan" and certainly not yet a "project." It would require a very large amount of preliminary surveys to establish the type of dam, the method of construction and even the line which it would most efficiently follow across the sea. That a 280-mile dam through shallow water is an engineering possibility cannot be doubted.

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What it would cost is another problem, but anything that can help avoid an annual billion-ruble loss is worth looking into from a Russian standpoint.

It seems to be the simplest way to save the fisheries, including the caviar trade. After all, the Russians cannot abandon their hydroelectric projects for this purpose, especially since these projects are only a fairly minor water-loss factor. The real reason is a minor climatic change. But agai[illegible] that change merely accele[illegible] something that had been going o[illegible] at a lesser rate for centuries.

And the whole trouble started, of course, way back in that unknown year when the Black Sea managed to break through to the Mediterranean, thereby draining the Sarmatian Sea.

— WILLY LEY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Excerpts from "Telephone Almanac for 1958," published by the Bell Telephone System, free on request:

"Germanium used in Bell System transistors is perhaps the purest substance known. It is refined so that impurities are estimated at only five parts in 100 billion — roughly equal to a pinch of salt in 35 freight cars of sugar."

"According to a recent survey, the average man, in his lifetime, spends 8,760 hours telephoning — the equivalent of one full year." *(No statistics are offered on the average woman: Ed.)*

"Betsy, the Baltimore chimpanzee, whose paintings sold at a price to make many full-fledged artists envious . . . gained another distinction: she's listed under 'artists' in Baltimore's classified telephone directory."

"Someone with a flair for statistics figured out how much you can say in a three-minute long distance call. If you talk slowly, you'll average perhaps 450 words. Talking a 'blue streak' will let you say about 750 words. Just by the way of comparison, Lincoln used 267 words in his Gettysburg address. Hamlet's to-be-or-not-to-be soliloquy, by Mr. Shakespeare, ran to 263. If spoken over the telephone, they would both be well within the three-minute period." *(If 450 words are the average at slow speed, these 263-267 examples evidently are meant to allow the other party to answer — if he can think of anything appropriate: Ed.)*

"Metals that develop a 'five o'clock shadow' are undergoing intensive research at Bell Telephone Laboratories. Hairlike metal strands — called 'whiskers' — grow on some types of telephone equipment and cause short circuits . . . the metal whiskers have extraordinary strength — greater than the metal from which they sprouted." *(Any shaver knows that: Ed.)*

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Going straight meant crooked planning. He'd never make it unless he somehow managed to

PICK A CRIME

By RICHARD R. SMITH

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

THE GIRL was tall, wide-eyed and brunette. She had the right curves in the right places and would have been beautiful if her nose had been smaller, if her mouth had been larger and if her hair had been wavy instead of straight.

"Hank said you wanted to see me," she said when she stopped beside Joe's table.

"Yeah." Joe nodded at the other chair. "Have a seat." He reached into a pocket, withdrew five ten-dollar bills and handed them to her. "I want you to do a job for me. It'll only take a few minutes."

The girl counted the money, then placed it in her purse. Joe noticed a small counterfeit-detector inside the purse before she closed it. "What's the job?"

"Tell you later." He gulped the remainder of his drink, almost pouring it down his throat.

"Hey. You trying to make yourself sick?"

"Not sick. Drunk. Been trying to

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get drunk all afternoon." As the liquor settled in his stomach, he waited for the warm glow. But the glow didn't come . . . the bartender had watered his drink again.

"Trying to get drunk?" the girl inquired. "Are you crazy?"

"No. It's simple. If I get drunk, I can join the AAA and get free room and board for a month while they give me a treatment."

It was easy enough to understand, he reflected, but a lot harder to do. The CPA robot bartenders saw to it that anyone got high if they wanted, but comparatively few got drunk. Each bartender could not only mix drinks but could also judge by a man's actions and speech when he was on the verge of drunkenness. At the proper time — since drunkenness was illegal — a bartender always watered the drinks.

Joe had tried dozens of times in dozens of bars to outsmart them, but had always failed. And in all of New York's millions, there had been only a hundred cases of intoxication during the previous year.

The girl laughed. "If you're that hard up, I don't know if I should take this fifty or not. Why don't you go out and get a job like everyone else?"

As an answer, Joe handed her his CPA ID card. She grunted when she saw the large letters that indicated the owner had Dangerous Criminal Tendencies.

WHEN she handed the card back, Joe fought an impulse to tear it to pieces. He'd done that once and gone through a mountain of red tape to get another — everyone was required by law to carry a CPA ID card and show it upon request.

"I'm sorry," the girl said. "I didn't know you were a DCT."

"And who'll hire a guy with criminal tendencies? You know the score. When you try to get a job, they ask to see your ID before they even tell you if there's an opening or not. If your CPA ID says you're a DCT, you're SOL and they tell you there's no openings. Oh, I've had several jobs . . . jobs like all DCTs get. I've been a garbage man, street-cleaner, ditch-digger—"

On the other side of the room, the jukebox came to life with a roar and a group of teen-agers scrambled to the dance floor.

Feeling safe from hidden microphones because of the uproar, he leaned across the table and whispered in the girl's ear, "That's what I want to hire you for. I want you to help me commit a crime. If I get convicted of a crime, I'll be able to get a good job!"

The girl's lips formed a bright red circle. "Say! You really got big plans, don't you?"

He smiled at her admiration. It *was* something big to plan a crime. A civilization weary of murder,

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robbery, kidnapping, counterfeiting, blackmail, rape, arson, and drunkenness had originated the CPA—Crime Prevention Association. There were no longer any prisons — CPA officials had declared loudly and emphatically that their job was to prevent crime, not punish it. And prevent it they did, with thousands of ingenious crime-prevention devices and methods. They had made crime almost impossible, and during the previous year, only a few hundred men in the whole country had been convicted of criminal acts.

No crime was ever punished. If a man was smart enough to kill someone, for instance, he wasn't sent to prison to be punished; he wasn't punished at all. Instead, he was sent to a hospital where all criminal tendencies were removed from his mind by psychologists, shock treatments, encephalographic devices, a form of prefrontal lobotomy and a dozen other methods. An expensive operation, but since there were few criminals—only ten in New York during the past year — any city could afford the CPA hospitals.

The CPA system was, actually, cheaper than previous methods because it did away with the damage caused by countless crimes; did away with prisons and their guards, large police forces, squad cars and weapons.

And, ironically, a man who *did* commit a crime was a sort of hero. He was a hero to the millions of men and women who had suppressed impulses to kill someone, beat their mates, get drunk, or kick a dog. Not only a hero, but because of the CPA Treatment, he was — when he left one of the CPA hospitals — a thoroughly honest and hard-working individual . . . a man who could be trusted with any responsibility, any amount of money. And therefore, an EX (a convicted criminal who received the treatment was commonly called an Ex because he was in the strictest sense of the word an *Ex*-criminal) . . . an Ex was always offered the best jobs.

"Well," the girl said. "I'm honored. Really. But I got a date at ten. Let's get it over with. You said it'd only take a few minutes."

"Okay. Let's go."

THE girl followed him across the room, around tables, through a door, down a hall, through a back door and into the alley.

She followed him up the dark alley until he turned suddenly and ripped her blouse and skirt.

He surprised her completely, but when she recovered, she backed away, her body poised like a wrestler's. "What's the big idea?"

"Scream," Joe said. "Scream as loud as you can, and when the

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cops get here, tell 'em I tried to rape you."

The plan was perfect, he told himself. Attempted rape was one of the few things that was a crime merely because a man attempted it. A crime because it theoretically inflicted psychological injury upon the intended victim — and because millions of women voters had voted it a crime. On the other hand, attempted murder, robbery, kidnapping, etc., were not crimes. They weren't crimes because the DCT didn't complete the act, and if he didn't complete the act, that meant simply that the CPA had once again functioned properly.

The girl shook her head vigorously. "Sorry, buddy. Can't help you that way. Why didn't you tell me what you wanted?"

"What's the matter?" Joe complained. "I'm not asking you to do anything wrong."

"You stupid jerk. What do you think this is — the Middle Ages? Don't you know almost every woman knows how to defend herself? I'm a sergeant in the WSDA!"

Joe groaned. The WSDA — Women's Self-Defense Association — a branch of the CPA. The WSDA gave free instruction in judo and jujitsu, even developed new techniques of wrestling and instructed only women in those new techniques.

The girl was still shaking her head. "Can't do it, buddy. I'd lose my rank if you were convicted of—"

"Do I have to *make* you scream?" Joe inquired tiredly and advanced toward the girl.

"— and that rank carries a lot of weight. Hey! *Stop it!*"

Joe discovered to his dismay that the girl was telling the truth when she said she was a sergeant in the WSDA. He felt her hands on his body, and in the time it takes to blink twice, he was flying through the air.

The alley's concrete floor was hard — it had always been hard, but he became acutely aware of its lack of resiliency when his head struck it. There was a wonderful moment while the world was filled with beautiful stars and streaks of lightning through which he heard distant police sirens. But the wonderful moment didn't last long and darkness closed in on him.

WHEN he awoke, a rough voice was saying, "Okay. Snap out of it."

He opened his eyes and recognized the police commissioner's office. It would be hard not to recognize: the room was large, devoid of furniture except for a desk and chairs, but the walls were lined with the controls of television screens, electronic calculators and a hundred other machines that formed New York's mechanical police force.

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Commissioner Hendricks was a remarkable character. There was something wrong with his glands, and he was a huge, greasy bulk of a man with bushy eyebrows and a double chin. His steel-gray eyes showed something of his intelligence and he would have gone far in politics if fate hadn't made him so ugly, for more than half the voters who elected men to high political positions were women.

Anyone who knew Hendricks well liked him, for he was a friendly, likable person. But the millions of women voters who saw his face on posters and on their TV screens saw only the ugly face and heard only the harsh voice. The President of the United States was a capable man, but also a very handsome one, and the fact that a man who looked something like a bulldog had been elected as New York's police commissioner was a credit to Hendricks and millions of women voters.

"Where's the girl?" Joe asked.

"I processed her while you were out cold. She left. Joe, you—"

"Okay," Joe said. "I'll save you the trouble. I admit it. Attempted rape. I confess."

Hendricks smiled. "Sorry, Joe. You missed the boat again." He reached out and turned a dial on his desk top. "We had a microphone hidden in that alley. We have a lot of microphones hidden in a lot of alleys. You'd be surprised at the number of conspiracies that take place in alleys!"

Joe listened numbly to his voice as it came from one of the hundreds of machines on the walls, *"Scream. Scream as loud as you can, and when the cops get here, tell 'em I tried to rape you."* And then the girl's voice, *"Sorry, buddy. Can't help—"*

He waved his hand. "Okay. Shut it off. I confess to conspiracy."

HENDRICKS rose from behind the desk, walked leisurely to where Joe was slouched in a chair. "Give me your CPA ID."

Joe handed him the card with trembling fingers. He felt as if the world had collapsed beneath him. Conspiracy to commit a crime wasn't a crime. Anyone could conspire. And if the conspirators were prevented from committing a crime, then that meant the CPA had functioned properly once again. That meant the CPA had once again *prevented* crime, and the CPA didn't punish crimes or attempted crimes, and it didn't attempt to prevent crimes *by* punishment. If it did, that would be a violation of the New Civil Rights.

Hendricks crossed the room, deposited the card in a slot and punched a button. The machine hummed and a new card appeared.

When Hendricks handed him the new card, Joe saw that the words DANGEROUS CRIMI-

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NAL TENDENCIES were now in red and larger than before. And, in slightly smaller print, the ID card stated that the owner was a DCT First Class.

"You've graduated," Hendricks said coldly. "You guys never learn, do you? Now you're a DCT First Class instead of a Second Class. You know what that means?"

Hendricks leaned closer until Joe could feel his breath on his face. "That means your case history will be turned over to the newspapers. You'll be the hobby of thousands of amateur cops. You know how it works? It's like this. The Joneses are sitting around tomorrow night and they're bored. Then Mr. Jones says, 'Let's go watch this Joe Harper.' So they look up your record — amateur cops always keep records of First Classes in scrapbooks — and they see that you stop frequently at Walt's Tavern.

"So they go there and they sit and drink and watch you, trying not to let you know they're watching you. They watch you all night, just hoping you'll do something exciting, like trying to kill someone, so they can be the first ones to yell *'Police!'* They'll watch you because it's exciting to be an amateur cop, and if they ever *did* prevent you from committing a crime, they'd get a nice reward and they'd be famous."

"Lay off," Joe said. "I got a headache. That girl — "

Hendricks leaned even closer and glared. "You listen, Joe. This is interesting. You see, it doesn't stop with Mr. and Mrs. Jones. There's thousands of people like them. Years ago, they got their kicks from reading about guys like you, but these days things are dull because it's rare when anyone commits a crime. So every time you walk down the street, there'll be at least a dozen of 'em following you, and no matter where you go, you can bet there'll be some of 'em sitting next to you, standing next to you.

"During the day, they'll take your picture with their spy cameras that look like buttons on their coats. At night, they'll peep at you through your keyhole. Your neighbors across the street will watch you through binoculars and — "

"Lay off!"

JOE squirmed in the chair. He'd been lectured by Hendricks before and it was always an unpleasant experience. The huge man was like a talking machine once he got started, a machine that couldn't be stopped.

"And the kids are the worst," Hendricks continued. "They have Junior CPA clubs. They keep records of hoodlums like you in little cardboard boxes. They'll stare at you on the street and stare at you through restaurant windows while you're eating meals. They'll follow you in public rest rooms and watch you out of the corners of their eyes

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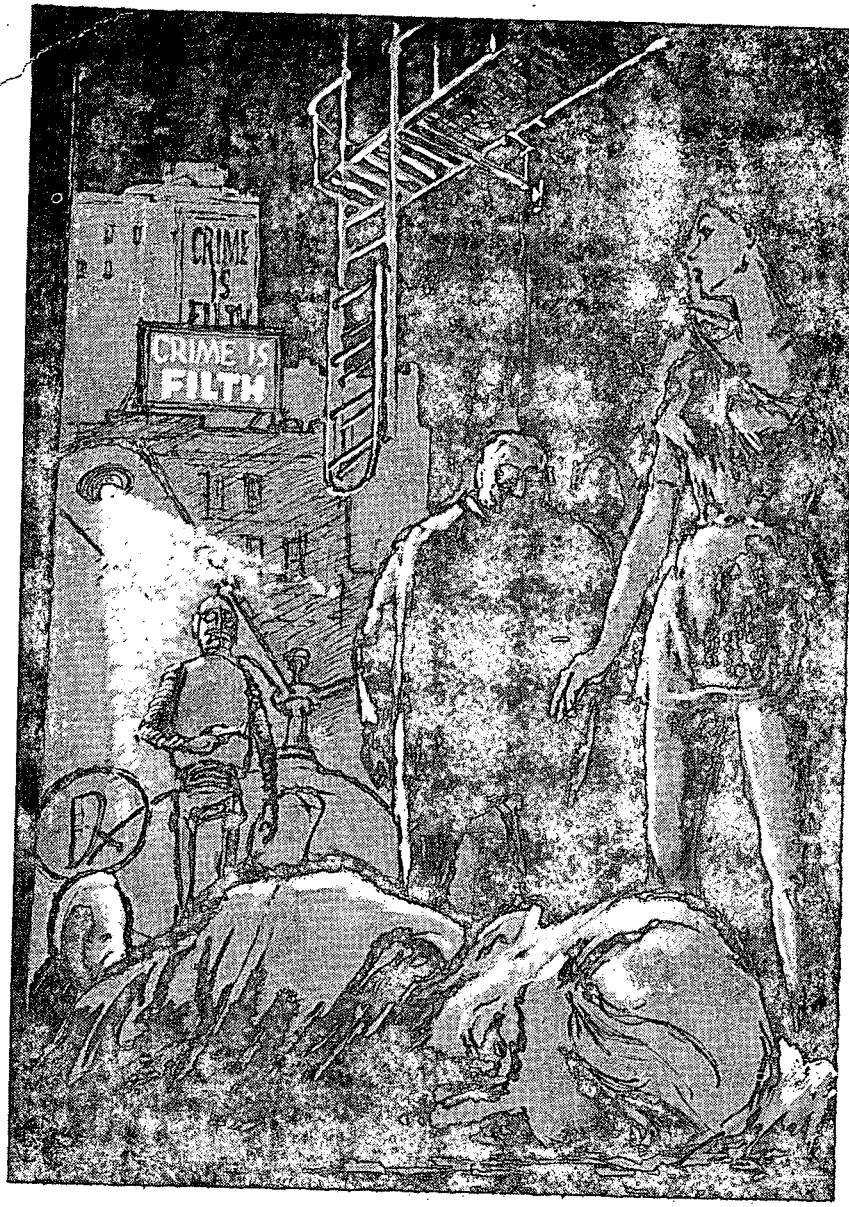

PICK A CRIME

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while they wash their little hands, and almost every day when you look back, you'll see a dozen freckle-faced little boys following you half a block behind, giggling and gaping at you. They'll follow you until the day you die, because you're a freak!"

Joe couldn't stand the breath in his face any longer. He rose and paced the floor.

"And it doesn't end *there*, Joe. It goes on and on. You'll be the object of every do-gooder and parlor psychologist. Strangers will stop you on the street and say, 'I'd like to help you, friend.' Then they'll ask you queer questions like, "Did your father reject you when you were a child?' 'Do you like girls?' 'How does it feel to be a DCT First Class?' And then there'll be the strangers who hate DCTs. They'll stop you on the street and insult you, call you names, spit on you and —"

"Okay, goddam it! *Stop it!*"

Hendricks stopped, wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief and lit a cigarette.

"I'm doing you a favor, Joe. I'm trying to explain something you're too dumb to realize by yourself. We've taught everyone to hate crime and criminals . . . to *hate* them as nothing has ever been hated before. Today a criminal is a freak, an alien. Your life will be a living hell if you don't leave New York. You should go to some small town where there aren't many people, or be a hermit, or go to Iceland or —"

Joe eyed the huge man suspiciously. "*Favor*, did you say? The day you do *me* a favor —"

Hendricks shrugged his shoulders negligently. "Not entirely a favor. I want to get rid of you. Usually I come up here and sit around and read books. But guys like you are a nuisance and take up my time."

"I couldn't leave if I wanted to," Joe said. "I'm flat broke. Thanks to your CPA system, a DCT can't get a decent job."

HENDRICKS reached into a pocket, withdrew several bills and extended them. "I'll loan you some money. You can sign an IOU and pay me back a little at a time."

Joe waved the money away. "Listen, why don't you do me a favor? Why don't you frame me? If I'm such a nuisance, pin a crime on me — any crime."

"Can't do it. Convicting a man of a crime he didn't commit is a violation of Civil Rights and a crime in itself."

"Umm."

"Why don't you take the free psycho treatment? A man doesn't *have* to be a DCT. With the free treatment, psychologists can remove all your criminal tendencies and —"

"Go to those *head-shrinkers?*"

Hendricks shrugged again. "Have it your way."

Joe laughed. "If your damned

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CPA is so all-powerful, why can't you *make* me go?"

"Violation of Civil Rights."

"Damn it, there must be some way you can help me! We both want the same thing. We both want to see me convicted of a crime."

"How can I help you without committing a crime myself?" Hendricks walked to his desk, opened a drawer and removed a small black book. "See this? It contains names and addresses of all the people in New York who aren't properly protected. Every week we find people who aren't protected properly — blind spots in our protection devices. As soon as we find them, we take steps to install anti-robbery devices, but this is a big city and sometimes it takes days to get the work done.

"In the meantime, any one of these people could be robbed. But what can I do? I can't hold this book in front of your nose and say, 'Here, Joe, pick a name and go out and rob him.' " He laughed nervously. "If I did that, I'd be committing a crime myself!"

He placed the book on the desk top, took a handkerchief from a pocket again and wiped sweat from his face. "Excuse me a minute. I'm dying of thirst. There's a water cooler in the next room."

Joe stared at the door to the adjoining office as it closed behind the big man. Hendricks was — unbelievably — offering him a victim, offering him a crime!

Almost running to the desk, Joe opened the book, selected a name and address and memorized it: *John Gralewski, Apt. 204, 2141 Orange St.*

When Hendricks came back, Joe said, "Thanks."

"Huh? Thanks for what? I didn't do anything."

WHEN Joe reached the street, he hurried toward the nearest subway. As a child, he had been frightened of the dark. As a man, he wasn't afraid of the dark itself, but the darkened city always made him feel ill at ease. The uneasiness was, more than anything else, caused by his own imagination. He hated the CPA and at night he couldn't shrug the feeling that the CPA lurked in every shadow, watching him, waiting for him to make a mistake.

Imagination or not, the CPA was almost everywhere a person went. Twenty-four hours a day, millions of microphones hidden in taverns, alleys, restaurants, subways and every other place imaginable waited for someone to say the wrong thing. Everything the microphones picked up was routed to the CPA Brain, a monster electronic calculator.

If the words "Let's see a movie" were received in the Brain, they were discarded. But if the words "Let's roll this guy" were received, the message was traced and a police helicopter would be at the scene in

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two minutes. And scattered all over the city were not only hidden microphones, but hidden television cameras that relayed visual messages to the Brain, and hidden machines that could detect a knife or a gun in someone's pocket at forty yards.

Every place of business from the largest bank to the smallest grocery store was absolutely impenetrable. No one had even tried to rob a place of business for years.

Arson was next to impossible because of the heat-detectors—devices placed in every building that could detect, radarlike, any intensity of heat above that caused by a cigarette lighter. Chemical research had made poisoning someone an impossibility. There were no drugs containing poison, and while an ant-poison might kill ants, no concentrated amount of it would kill a human.

The FBI had always been a powerful organization, but under the supervision of the CPA, it was a scientific colossus and to think of kidnapping someone or to contemplate the use of narcotics was pointless. A counterfeiter's career was always short-lived: every place of business and millions of individuals had small counterfeit-detectors that could spot a fake and report it directly to the Brain.

And the percentage of crimes had dwindled even more with the appearance of the robot police officers. Many a criminal in the past had gambled that he could outshoot a pursuing policeman. But the robots were different: they weren't flesh and blood. Bullets bounced off them and their aim was infallible.

IT was like a fantastic dream come true. Only the dream wasn't fantastic any more. With the huge atomic power plants scattered across the country and supplying endless electrical power at ridiculously low prices, no endeavor that required power was fantastic. The power required to operate the CPA devices cost each taxpayer an average of four dollars a year, and the invention, development and manufacture of the devices had cost even less.

And the CPA had attacked crime through society itself, striking at the individual. In every city there were neon signs that blinked subliminally with the statement, CRIME IS FILTH. Listening to a radio or watching television, if a person heard station identification, he invariably heard or saw just below perception the words CRIME IS FILTH. If he went for a walk or a ride, he saw the endless subliminal posters declaring CRIME IS FILTH, and if he read a magazine or newspaper he always found, in those little dead spaces where an editor couldn't fit anything else, the below-perception words CRIME IS FILTH.

It was monotonous and, after a

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while, a person looked at the words and heard them without thinking about them. And they were imprinted on his subconscious over and over, year after year, until he knew that crime was the same as filth and that criminals were filthy things.

Except men like Joe Harper. No system is perfect. Along with thousands of other DCTs, Joe refused to believe it, and when he reached apartment 204 at 2141 Orange Street, he felt as if he'd inherited a gold mine.

The hall was dimly lit, but when he stood before the door numbered 204, he could see that the wall on either side of it was *new*. That is, instead of being covered with dust, dirt and stains as the other walls were, it was clean. The building was an old one, the hall was wide, and the owner had obviously constructed a wall across the hall, creating another room. If the owner had reported the new room as required by law, it would have been wired with CPA burglarproof devices, but evidently he didn't want to pay for installation.

When Joe entered the cubbyhole, he had to stand to one side in order to close the door behind him. The place was barely large enough for the bed, chair and bureau; it was a place where a man could fall down at night and sleep, but where no normal man could live day after day.

Fearing that someone might detect him before he actually committed the crime, Joe hurried to the bureau and searched it.

HE broke out in a sweat when he found nothing but underwear and old magazines. If he stole underwear and magazines, it would still be a crime, but the newspapers would splash satirical headlines. Instead of being respected as a successful criminal, he would be ridiculed.

He stopped sweating when he found a watch under a pile of underwear. The crystal was broken, one hand was missing and it wouldn't run, but — perfection itself — engraved on the back was the inscription, *To John with Love*. His trial would be a clean-cut one: it would be easy for the CPA to prove ownership and that a crime had been committed.

Chuckling with joy, he opened the window and shouted, *"Thief! Police! Help!"*

He waited a few seconds and then ran. When he reached the street, a police helicopter landed next to him. Strong metal arms seized him; cameras clicked and recorded the damning evidence.

When Joe was securely handcuffed to a seat inside the helicopter, the metal police officers rang doorbells. There was a reward for anyone who reported a crime, but no one admitted shouting the warning.

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HE was having a nightmare when he heard the voice, "Hey. Wake up. Hey!"

He opened his eyes, saw Hendricks' ugly face and thought for a minute he was still having the nightmare.

"I just saw your doctor," Hendricks said. "He says your treatment is over. You can go home now. I thought I'd give you a lift."

As Joe dressed, he searched his mind and tried to find some difference.

During the treatment, he had been unconscious or drugged, unable to think. Now he could think clearly, but he could find no difference in himself.

He felt more relaxed than he'd ever felt before, but that could be an after-effect of all the sedatives he'd been given. And, he noticed when he looked in the mirror, he was paler. The treatment had taken months and he had, between operations, been locked in his room.

Hendricks was standing by the window. Joe stared at the massive back. Deliberately goading his mind, he discovered the biggest change: Before, the mere sight of the man had aroused an intense hatred. Now, even when he tried, he succeeded in arousing only a mild hatred. They had toned down his capacity to hate, but not done away with it altogether.

"Come here and take a look at your public," said Hendricks.

Joe went to the window. Three stories below, a large crowd had gathered on the hospital steps: a band, photographers, television trucks, cameramen and autograph hunters. He'd waited a long time for this day. But now — another change in him —

He put the emotion into words: "I don't feel like a hero. Funny, but I don't."

"Hero!" Hendricks laughed and, with his powerful lungs, it sounded like a bull snorting. "You think a successful criminal is a hero? You stupid — "

He laughed again and waved a hand at the crowd below them. "You think those people are down there because they admire what you did? They're down there waiting for you because they're curious, because they're glad the CPA caught you, and because they're glad you're an Ex. You're an *ex*-criminal now, and because of your treatment, you'll never be able to commit another crime as long as you live. And that's the kind of guy they admire, so they want to see you, shake your hand and get your autograph."

Joe didn't understand Hendricks completely, but the part he did understand he didn't believe. A crowd was waiting for him. He could see the people with his own eyes. When he left the hospital, they'd cheer and shout and ask for his autograph. If he wasn't a hero, *what was he?*

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IT took half an hour to get through the crowd. Cameras clicked all around him, a hundred kids asked for his autograph, everyone talked at once and cheered, smiled, laughed, patted him on the back and cheered some more.

Only one thing confused him during all the excitement: a white-haired old lady with tears in her eyes said, "Thank heaven it was only a watch. Thank heaven you didn't kill someone! God bless you, son." And then the old lady had handed him a box of fudge and left him in total confusion.

What she said didn't make sense. If he had killed someone rather than stealing a watch, he would be even more of a hero and the crowd would have cheered even louder. He knew: he had stood outside the CPA hospitals many times and the crowds always cheered louder when an ex-murderer came out.

In Hendricks' robot-chauffeured car, he ate the fudge and consoled himself with the thought, *People are funny. Who can understand 'em?*

Feeling happy for one of the few times in his life, he turned toward Hendricks and said, "Thanks for what you did. It turned out great. I'll be able to get a good job now."

"That's why I met you at the hospital," Hendricks said. "I want to explain some things. I've known you for a long time and I know you're spectacularly dumb. You can't figure out some things for yourself and I don't want you walking around the rest of your life thinking I did you a favor."

Joe frowned. Few men had ever done him a favor and he had rarely thanked anyone for anything. And now . . . after thanking the man who'd done him the biggest favor of all, the man was denying it!

"You robbed Gralewski's apartment," Hendricks said. "Gralewski is a CPA employee and he doesn't live in the apartment you robbed. The CPA pays the rent for that one and he lives in another. We have a lot of places like that. You see, it gives us a way to get rid of saps like you before they do real damage. We use it as a last resort when a DCT First Class won't take the free psycho treatment or — "

"Well, it's still a favor."

Hendricks' face hardened. "Favor? You wouldn't know a favor if you stumbled over one. I did it because it's standard procedure for your type of case. Anyone can — free of charge — have treatment by the best psychologists. Any DCT can stop being a DCT by simply asking for the treatment and taking it. But you wouldn't do that. You wanted to commit a crime, get caught and be a hero . . . an *Ex*."

THE car passed one of the CPA playgrounds. Boys and girls of all ages were laughing, squealing with joy as they played games designed by CPA psychologists to

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relieve tension. And — despite the treatment, Joe shuddered when he saw the psychologists standing to one side, quietly watching the children. The whole world was filled with CPA employees and volunteer workers. Everywhere you went, it was there, quietly watching you and analyzing you, and if you showed criminal tendencies, it watched you even more closely and analyzed you even more deeply until it took you apart and put you back together again the way it wanted you to be.

"Being an Ex, you'll get the kind of job you always wanted," Hendricks continued. "You'll get a good-paying job, but you'll work for it. You'll work eight hours a day, work harder than you've ever worked before in your life, because every time you start to loaf, a voice in your head is going to say, *Work! Work!* Exes always get good jobs because employers know they're good workers.

"But during these next few days, you'll discover what being an Ex is like. You see, Joe, the treatment can't possibly take all the criminal tendencies out of a man. So the treatment does the next best thing — you'll find a set of laws written in your mind. You might *want* to break one now and then, but you won't be able. I'll give you an illustration . . ."

Joe's face reddened as Hendricks proceeded to call him a series of names. He wanted to smash the fat, grinning face, but the muscles in his arm froze before it moved it an inch.

And worse than that, a brief pain ripped through his skull. A pain so intense that, had it lasted a second longer, he would have screamed in agony. And above the pain, a voice whispered in his head, *Unlawful to strike someone except in self-defense.*

He opened his mouth to tell Hendricks exactly what he thought of him, the CPA, the whole world. But the words stayed in his throat, the pain returned, and the mental voice whispered, *Unlawful to curse.*

He had never heard how the treatment prevented an Ex from committing a crime. And now that he knew, it didn't seem fair. He decided to tell the whole story to the newspapers as soon as he could. And as soon as that decision formed in his mind, his body froze, the pain returned and the voice, *Unlawful to divulge CPA procedure.*

"See what I mean?" Hendricks asked. "A century ago, you would have been locked in a prison and taxpayers' money would have supported you until the day you died. With the CPA system, you're returned to society, a useful citizen, unable to commit the smallest crime. And you've got a big hand in your dirty little mind that's going to slap it every time you get the wrong kind of thought. It'll keep slapping you until you learn. It might take

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weeks, months or years, but you'll learn sooner or later to not even think about doing anything wrong."

HE lit a cigarette and blew a smoke ring at the car's plush ceiling. "It's a great system, isn't it, Joe? A true democracy. Even a jerk like you is free to do what he wants, as long as it's legal."

"I think it's a lousy, filthy system." Joe's head was still tingling with pain and he felt suffocated. The CPA was everywhere, only now it was also inside his head, telling him he couldn't do this, couldn't do that. All his life it had been telling him he couldn't do things he wanted to do and *now* . . .

Hendricks laughed. "You'll change your opinion. We live in a clean, wonderful world, Joe. A world of happy, healthy people. Except for freaks like yourself, criminals are—"

"Let me out!" Joe grabbed at the door and was on the sidewalk, slamming the door behind him before the car stopped completely.

He stared at the car as it pulled away from the curb and glided into the stream of traffic again. He realized he was a prisoner . . . a prisoner inside his own body . . . made a prisoner by a world that hated him back.

He wanted to spit his contempt, but the increasingly familiar pain and voice prevented him.

It was unlawful to spit on a sidewalk.

— RICHARD R. SMITH

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BRIDLE

Mr. E. Vandenberg had a practical reason for wanting something old and something new — but what would he borrow — and would it be blue?

HE was a tall, broad-shouldered, collegiate-looking young man with a neat crewcut and, in spite of the slight look of weariness in his face, a ready smile. The back of his flowered sport shirt was damp with perspiration. He carried a small suitcase and he paused for a moment in the shade, looking skepti-

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SHOWER

By LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

Illustrated by DILLON

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cally down the quiet residential street, before he stepped out into the boiling sun and walked slowly up the sidewalk to the first house.

He rang the bell and stepped back, whistling cheerfully. The door opened a crack. A woman's voice snapped, "I don't want any." The door closed.

He bowed solemnly at the closed door and turned away. A small boy stepped out from behind a shrub and stared at him, freckled face tense with immodest curiosity. "Watcha sellin', mister?"

"Not selling a thing, son," he said. "I'm giving things away."

He rang the bell at the next house, got no response and turned away sadly. The boy popped into sight again, from behind a hedge. "Watcha givin' away?"

"Shoelaces," he said.

At the third house, the door was opened by a red-faced, bosomy blonde, who eyed him suspiciously. "Oh, God!" she exclaimed. "More magazine subscriptions. We average three of you guys a week."

"Jeff Flowers is my name," he said, handing her a smartly engraved card. "I represent New for Old, Incorporated. Do you have any old shoelaces you'd like to dispose of?"

She scrutinized the card, glanced up at him with a comically puzzled look on her face, and suddenly doubled up with laughter. There was a faint trace of alcohol on her breath, and Flowers sniffed hungrily.

"Give me that line again," she said.

"Do you have any old shoelaces you'd like to dispose of?"

She giggled. "Don't tell me now—don't tell me. Let me guess. If I buy six pairs of shoes, you'll throw in the shoelaces free of charge?"

"No, ma'am . . ."

"If I buy a thousand pairs of shoelaces, I get a pair of shoes free?"

OPENING the suitcase, he lifted out a tray, filled to overflowing with shoelaces. There were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, black, white shoelaces of all sizes and all shades. There were plaid shoelaces and polka-dot shoelaces. There were shoelaces gold-tipped and silver-tipped and plastic-tipped and jewel-studded.

"These shoelaces," he said, "are finest quality and the latest style. They're guaranteed to last the life of any two pairs of shoes you want to wear them in. For any pair of old shoelaces you wish to dispose of, I'll give you your choice of any pair of new shoelaces."

She bent over the tray. "Pretty things. What do they cost?"

"They are not for sale, ma'am. They are only for trade. One new pair for one old pair."

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She selected a chartreuse-and-brown plaid with gold tips. "These would look nice with a new summer outfit I have," she said. "How much?"

"One pair of old shoelaces."

She dropped the laces back onto the tray. "Cut the comedy. What's the price?"

"One pair of old shoelaces."

"You mean to tell me you'll take a pair of old laces for—"

"Absolutely. For any old pair, you get a new pair." He grinned. "No strings attached."

"Just a minute," she said.

A moment later, she was back, handing him two soiled, much-abused brown shoelaces. He knotted them together and dropped them into his suitcase.

"I get my choice?" she said.

"You certainly do."

She picked up the plaid, gold-tipped pair. "That's all there is to it?"

"That's all."

She examined the new pair carefully, stretched them out, tugged at them and wadded them up. "There's got to be a catch somewhere. Is there any limit?"

"No limit at all. One pair or a thousand—a new pair for every old pair you give me."

"Come in," she said.

He sat down in the cool living room and waited. Five minutes later, she returned, breathing heavily.

"Got every shoelace in the house," she said, dumping them on the sofa beside him. "Twelve pairs."

He separated them into pairs, knotted them together and counted. "Twelve pair," he agreed. "Help yourself."

SHE did, stirring critically through the display of laces and mulling over her choices. "Twelve," she said finally.

"I thank you very much," Flowers said.

"Look. There's got to be a catch somewhere."

"No catch. Let me show you." He took a glittering gadget out of his suitcase. "We'll put one of the old laces in here. Like this—see how it clamps in? Now you turn the crank and see if you can break it."

She gave the crank a quick turn. The shoelace snapped.

"Now we'll try one of the new ones," he said.

He clamped it in, and her arms bulged as she strained at the crank. Nothing happened.

"You can't break one," he said, "and you can't wear one out. We guarantee them for the life of two pairs of shoes, but actually they'll last you a lifetime."

He replaced the gadget and the tray, snapped the suitcase shut and got to his feet. "Remember my company's name," he said. "New

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for Old, Incorporated. You'll be hearing more about it."

"I hope you don't think you'll make a living at this."

Flowers flashed a smile. "Fortunately I don't have to take a commission in old shoelaces. I'm on salary."

The boy was waiting for him at the sidewalk. "You really givin' away shoelaces?" he demanded.

"Not exactly," Flowers said. "I'm trading them. Let's see yours. Oh—too bad. You have straps instead of laces. Sorry, but we can't do business."

He walked on to the next house, leaving the boy staring after him.

Some dozens of houses and a couple of hours later, pangs of hunger sent Flowers wearily back to his car and started him in search of a restaurant. He located a little neighborhood cafe and walked in, carrying his suitcase with him, and took a seat at the counter. He ordered coffee and a pair of hamburgers, and then spun around on his stool for a professional appraisal of any shoelaces that might be in evidence.

Three stools away, the only other customer at the counter sat back flexing his brawny arms and nodded pleasantly. "Think it'll ever get around to raining?"

"I hadn't thought about it," Flowers said. "But I suppose it'll have to get around to it, sooner or later."

"It better. Hasn't rained for over a month now and the radio said that the farmers are going to be hit pretty hard. They're bringing in some guy that says he can make it rain—you know, one of those deals where they drop some stuff out of an airplane."

"More power to him," Flowers said. "Will they let us know when, or do we have to start carrying raincoats all the time?"

"That's a good one. Ah, it probably won't work." He glanced curiously at the suitcase. "What's your line?"

"Shoelaces," Flowers said. He opened the suitcase and set the tray on the counter.

THE waitress paused with a cup of coffee in each hand and stared. "Say," she said. "Those are pretty."

"Aren't they?" Flowers agreed.

She delivered the coffee and hurried back. "What do they cost?"

"They aren't for sale. I'll arrange a trade with you, though."

"Oh, no, you don't! I'll buy for cash or not at all."

"I'll trade you," Flowers said quickly, "for a pair of old shoelaces."

The waitress stalked away angrily. She was back a moment later, shoving the tray of shoelaces aside to plop Flowers' sandwiches and coffee down in front of him.

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She departed without speaking.

Flowers' companion at the counter chuckled. "You ought to have a better line than that."

"I suppose so," Flowers said. "Unfortunately, that's the way it has to be. The boss won't let me sell them. If people won't trade, they can keep the ones they have."

"Is that a fact? You giving me straight dope?"

"Absolutely."

"You mean you'll take these old laces I'm wearing and give me a new pair?"

"Try me and see."

"The fellow stooped over and began yanking out his shoelaces. "You better be telling the truth," he said, "or *you're* going to put these back in."

He handed the pair to Flowers. Dirty black. Flowers passed him the tray and he selected a clean black pair in return. The waitress watched the transaction incredulously, stooped down behind the counter and came up with a soiled white pair. She selected white with blue polka dots. Flowers passed out his cards.

"What do you get out of this?" the fellow asked.

"A pay envelope," Flowers said.

"Yeah. What does your boss get out of it?"

"A lot of used shoelaces."

"What good are they? I mean is this some new product you're introducing or something?"

"I'll tell you how it is," Flowers said. "Have you ever noticed, when you were shining your shoes, how you always get some shoe polish on your laces?"

"Yeah, I suppose you do, if you don't take 'em out."

"My boss has developed a new process. He extracts that polish from the shoelaces and cans it and sells it."

The fellow stared for maybe thirty-five seconds before he grabbed his check and left. The waitress stalked away again. Flowers shrugged and bit into a sandwich.

A newcomer slid onto the stool beside him, reached for a menu and said, "Think we'll ever get some rain?"

"Let's talk about shoelaces," Flowers said.

IT was after six when Flowers got around to reporting in. His headquarters was a tiny side-street shop in the business district. The sign across the front of the shop read, NEW FOR OLD, INCORPORATED. In the window was a dazzling assortment of shoelaces, and another sign, *"Used shoelaces wanted. Come in and trade. One new pair for each old pair you bring in."*

A bell tinkled as Flowers opened the door. He winked familiarly at the shapely young lady

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who occupied a desk in one corner of the rooms, assured himself that the place was otherwise unpopulated, and strode over to give her a robust embrace.

"Have a good day?" she murmured.

"Fair," he said.

Flowers glanced about the room and grimaced at the overwhelming quantity of shoelaces that filled display cases and erupted into enormous piles on tables. He did not find it difficult to return his attention to the young lady.

"Did you have a good day, Miss Star?"

She smiled teasingly. "Fair."

"Dancing tonight?"

It was a rhetorical question. She smiled again and said, "The boss wants to see you."

"Fancy that. What'd I do wrong?"

"Nothing. He's going out of town for a few days and he wants to tell you I'm boss while he's gone."

"What a pleasant thought! Supposing you order me to take the afternoon off tomorrow. I've been working too hard, you know. Then, as long as you're the boss, you can take the afternoon off yourself and we'll go on a picnic."

"Can't you take this job seriously?"

"I cannot," Flowers said. "I know the pay is magnificent and I know Mr. Vandenberg gives every indication of being more affluent than the U. S. Treasury. All the same, I can't see any future in trading shoelaces. I want to get myself an honest job, so we can get married."

"What's wrong with getting married on this job?"

Flowers shook his head. "Eventually we're going to corner the market with these non-breakable, last-a-lifetime shoelaces, and where will that leave us?"

"Oh, we'll be branching out into other things before long. Mr. Vandenberg says—"

"I know what he says. I also know that there can't be much profit—if any at all—in trading new things for old. It doesn't take a business genius to figure that out."

"I still think this is some kind of promotion stunt."

Flowers snorted. "Who ever heard of a promotion without publicity? The only people breathing a word about this are a few gullible door-to-door men and you here in the shop."

He emptied his collection of used shoelaces onto her desk and she sighed and started to count.

"Better go see Mr. Vandenberg," she said.

FLOWERS went down a narrow passageway, knocked, opened at the command of a deep, nasal voice. Mr. E. Vandenberg—if he had a first name, his employees had never discovered what it

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was—glanced up from a pile of newspapers. Newspapers were one of Mr. E. Vandenberg's many peculiarities. His cramped office looked like a back-issue warehouse. Newspapers were piled in, under and on anything that could conceivably hold newspapers—newspapers in a multitude of languages from all over the world. A casual observer would have taken Mr. E. Vandenberg for the director of a global clipping service, rather than a used-shoelace tycoon.

Another of Vandenberg's peculiarities was his face. His leathery, oily skin hung in sagging folds. It was a big face and it was absolutely devoid of expression. It never registered anger or displeasure. It never registered approval or enthusiasm. Mr. Vandenberg's large, greenish eyes studied his employees with a speculative intensity that vaguely reminded Flowers of an owl staring at a mouse. Flowers did not like Mr. Vandenberg.

"Have a good day?" Vandenberg asked.

"Pretty fair." Flowers looked at Vandenberg's thick, unruly hair. On the first day of her employment, Janet Star had pronounced that well-nourished thatch to be a wig, and Flowers had been speculating about it ever since. So far, he had managed to resist the temptation to give it a firm tug and resolve the issue in a definitive manner. "Three hundred pairs," he said.

Vandenberg's expression did not change. "Wonderful," his monotone rumbled. "That's a new record, isn't it? Have you drawn your replacements?"

"Janet's counting the returns now."

Vandenberg seemed to nod from the general region of his protruding stomach. "I find it necessary to be out of town for a few days. Miss Star will handle the territorial assignments. I trust that no complications will arise."

"They never do," Flowers said.

Flowers made no move to leave, and Vandenberg said, "Is there anything else?"

"No, sir. Except that I'd like to give notice. No particular hurry — whenever you are able to replace me."

Vandenberg slowly settled back in his chair, his unblinking eyes fixed upon Flowers. "You don't like to work for me? How is that? You do better than anyone else."

"Oh, I don't mind the work. It's just that I don't seem to understand this business. I can't see much future in it."

VANDENBERG leaned forward, his body stiff. "It has a wonderful future. Especially for you. As soon as this territory is properly developed, we'll be opening some new branch offices. I plan

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to put you in charge of one of them and eventually I expect to have you supervising branch offices in several states." He got awkwardly to his feet. "That's in the future, of course. For the present, I'll raise your salary twenty dollars a week, and your salary will double when you take charge of a branch office. Satisfactory?"

"Well . . ." Flowers said.

Vandenberg's expressionless voice rumbled on while he gently patted Flowers on the back in the most approved fatherly manner. Flowers left the office a bit dazed.

"I offered my resignation," he told Janet.

"You *didn't!*" she cried.

"He told me no and raised me twenty a week. I'm to take charge of a branch office when this territory is fully developed—whatever that means—at double my present salary."

"Jeff!" she shrieked. "Then—"

"Yep. There must be something about this business that escapes me. Want to set a date?"

MR. E. Vandenberg left his office minutes later and started out through the front of the store. The spectacle which he encountered in the front room so disgusted and dismayed him that he retraced his steps and left by the rear door.

He drove out into the country, and by dark he had reached an abandoned farm forty miles from the city. Its abandonment had been a cause of considerable upset among the neighboring farmers. It was a shame, they said, to waste such good land. But the new owner, Mr. E. Vandenberg, was not interested in farming.

Vandenberg drove down a weed-choked lane, left his car in a rickety shed and strolled across a rolling, sun-parched pasture. At precisely 9:00 P.M., a looming dark object descended. Vandenberg climbed aboard, was received with considerable ceremony and addressed in an unearthly tongue as General Vrooz. The dark object shot upward, moving so quickly that radar instruments at a nearby air base had only the time to acknowledge its presence with a noncommital flicker.

As the dark object flashed outward from Earth, Mr. E. Vandenberg underwent a transformation. He removed not merely the unruly hair, but everything else. Everything. It would have been no minor shock to Janet Star had she known that the suspected wig extended to the soles of the feet.

General Vrooz emerged from the pupa of E. Vandenberg. He swabbed himself off quickly with the coordinated efforts of six spidery arms. He preened his scaly hide carefully, and then he settled himself in front of an observation port to gaze scornfully with a trio

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BRIDLE SHOWER

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of multi-faceted eyes at the rapidly retreating disc of the planet Earth.

GENERAL Vrooz was landed in a cavern on the dark side of Earth's lone satellite, known to natives as the Moon. He was escorted to his commanding officer's sumptuous quarters. He turned a dozen pounds of newspaper clippings over to an aide and worked busily on a report until his communicator broke in upon his activity with a brusque announcement.

"The Sector Commander is awake, sir."

"I'll join him immediately," General Vrooz announced.

In a spacious conference room, flanked by sparkling metallic walls and surrounded by scaly-hided subordinate officers, General Vrooz reported to his superior.

"Our approach," he announced, "is economic."

The Sector Commander waved three of his six arms in assent. "I suspected it would be, from the preliminary reports."

"Then you've familiarized yourself with the planet's organization?" General Vrooz said. "Excellent. We're commencing operations in one of the leading political and economic entities. The economic complex is delicately balanced — production, distribution and consumption. We intend to remove consumption from that cycle. The entire process will collapse, of course."

"How do you intend to proceed?"

"We shall simply trade new articles for old articles. The population will satisfy its wants by trading with us, and the production and distribution phases will be eliminated. Chaos will result. For example, a major native mode of transportation centers upon a machine called an automobile. It is the end-product of a very large industry, and in its operation it utilizes a fuel called gasoline, which is the end-product of another very large industry. We shall offer a substitute product and trade new for old. Our substitute will be superior to the native product, of course. It will use oxygen for fuel, extracting it from the atmosphere. This will destroy the market for automobiles and gasoline, and at one stroke we shall have demolished two vital industries."

"Shrewd planning. How are the initial experiments progressing?"

"Slowly. The natives have an innate suspicion which I do not exactly understand. Once this is overcome, I expect to progress rapidly."

The Sector Commander coldly studied a monstrous globe of the planet Earth. "When can we take over?" he asked. "We'll have to give the fleet ample notice, you

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know. There were complaints that we moved too quickly in the Hanolff conquest."

"That was an entirely different type of operation," General Vrooz said. "I cannot set a date, as yet, but the military will have more than sufficient notice."

"What product are you using for your experiments?"

"Shoelaces," General Vrooz said, using the native tongue because the expression was untranslatable.

"Shoe—laces? What is that?"

VROOZ explained, and had to have E. Vandenberg's shoes brought in to make the matter clear.

"Their technology is certainly primitive," the Sector Commander said.

"Not all of their footwear requires laces," said General Vrooz. "But the majority does. It's a common article and it's inexpensive, which allays their suspicion somewhat. It is serving our purpose well."

"Excellent. But how did you happen to decide upon this?"

General Vrooz's scaly sides twitched convulsively. "If you will pardon the levity, sir—I'm making use of a native proverb. Something about starting a new business on a shoestring."

He had to explain the interchangeability of the terms *shoestring* and *shoelace* before the Sector Commander indicated laughter by waving all six arms simultaneously.

General Vrooz returned to Earth and reluctantly re-encumbered himself with the synthetic epidermis of E. Vandenberg. Jeff Flowers and ten other young male employees continued to barter shoelaces with receptive housewives. More passersby stopped to stare at the sign in the shop window and increasing numbers came in to investigate. Janet Star installed a row of chairs for the use of customers removing and replacing shoelaces.

Word began to spread—slowly at first and then with an awesome velocity. Startled housewives hurried to their telephones to notify sisters, cousins, aunts, neighbors and chance acquaintances.

"A young man came to the door this afternoon and do you know what he *did?* You'll never believe it! He gave me eight pairs of new shoelaces for eight pairs of old ones. And they're *beautiful!*"

The amused businessman whose curiosity brought him into New for Old, Incorporated, returned on Saturday with his wife and children, so they could pick out their own shoelaces. Dozens of innocent door-to-door salesmen found themselves greeted with startling enthusiasm on the chance that they might be trading something new

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for something old. Jeff Flowers chalked up a record seven hundred exchanges in one day. Mr. E. Vandenberg stoically tabulated the daily totals and began to pick out sites for branch offices. New for Old, Incorporated, was ready to start expanding.

THE afternoon was precisely like any other afternoon of the preceding weeks, meaning that it was smoldering hot. The most that could be said was that it gave people something to talk about—the heat and the dryness.

Jeff Flowers moved wearily along a residential street. His mind was not on his work. The first of the week, he was scheduled to open a branch office in Seattle. He'd picked the place himself, after checking carefully to make certain that Seattle was neither hot nor dry. Janet was staying behind until she could break in a new girl for Mr. Vandenberg, and then she would join him in Seattle. They would get married. The pay was magnificent, with none of the petty deductions that plagued most workers. The total of their combined salaries was almost phenomenal enough to quiet Flowers' misgivings about the future of trading something new for something old.

In the meantime, there were shoelaces to trade. Word of his coming preceded him along the street. The housewives had their doors open and neat piles of shoelaces were waiting for him. If it hadn't been so infernally hot, he thought he might be able to run up a new record. But it was just too hot to move fast.

He mopped his brow with a handkerchief that had long since passed its saturation point, and glanced up at the sky. Dark clouds were drifting in over the city. He collected a total of fifteen pairs of used shoelaces at the next house, and by the time the delighted housewife had completed her selections, an occasional drop of rain was spattering against the windows.

Flowers started back toward his car, walking briskly. His walk changed to a trot and then to a headlong gallop as the heavy clouds suddenly dumped torrents of rain on the city. The long drought was over.

Half a block from his car, legs churning frantically, Flowers kicked off a shoe. He retrieved it and ran on in his sock. Five steps later, he lost the other shoe. He reached his car in a thoroughly drenched condition, suitcase in one hand and pair of shoes in the other, and flung himself into the front seat. He slammed the door, breathed a deep sigh of relief and turned his attention to his shoes.

The reason for their irresponsible behavior smote him in the

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face at one glance. He had no shoelaces.

He stared at the shoes for a long time while water thundered down on the roof above him and dripped from his trousers onto the floor below him. Then, heart beating violently, he took a bright New for Old, Incorporated shoelace from his suitcase, rolled down his window and held it out to the mercy of the downpour. Its bright color vanished. It quickly became a slimy, sticky mess and suddenly it disappeared. Even the metallic tips dissolved.

FLOWERS repeated the experiment twice, and then he sat hunched over his steering wheel, lost in thought. Rain flooded against his windshield. He started the motor and turned on the wipers; they made scarcely a ripple in the cascading rain. Street lights were on, pallid globs of whiteness, adding nothing to the almost-zero visibility. Driving was impossible. Flowers took a deep breath and edged away from the curb.

Twenty minutes and one dented fender later, he reached a drugstore. He made a dash for it, leaving his shoes in the car. He found that he was not alone in the matter of unconventional footwear. There were at least a dozen pairs of sopped socks and stockings in the place, and their owners were talking and gesticulating furiously. Something about shoelaces.

Flowers hurried into a phone booth and dialed New for Old, Incorporated. "Janet," he said. "Now listen carefully. You've got to get out of there. Those damned shoelaces dissolve in water, and heaven knows how many thousand people were caught wearing them in this rain. There's no telling what will happen. Get over to your apartment and I'll meet you there. I think we'd better beat it out of town."

"I can't!" Janet wailed. "The police are here now and—"

"I'll take that, miss," a masculine voice snapped. "Hello. Who is this?"

Flowers banged down the phone and fled.

Back in his car, he searched in his suitcase for a pair of old laces and got his shoes securely back onto his feet. He mentally crossed his fingers and started off again.

The rain had diminished to a steady downpour by the time he reached New for Old, Incorporated. The shop was locked. He turned away and marched resolutely toward police headquarters. And there he found Mr. E. Vandenberg, Janet, three fellow employees, and a police sergeant who cheerfully crossed his name off a list and invited him to join the others.

"These phony shoelaces are

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your responsibility," Flowers told Vandenberg. "What are you going to do about it?"

Vandenberg stood at the window, staring stony-faced out at the deluge. "Rain," he muttered. "Water. Rain. Water."

"Sure. And every pair of those shoelaces is guaranteed to last the life of two pairs of shoes."

"We shall replace every pair," Vandenberg said absently. "We shall produce a new shoelace that is not affected by this—rain."

"Great," said Flowers. "If somebody doesn't lynch us first. There are thousands of people running around barefoot this afternoon because of New for Old, Incorporated. I passed a shoe store on my way down here and the place was jammed with people buying shoelaces."

"Have no fear," Vandenberg said, leaning forward to watch the rivulets of water streaking down the window. "We shall give them two pair for every pair of the others."

JANET was tearful. "He just doesn't understand," she said. "He's in a terrible lot of trouble—all of us are. And it isn't because of the shoelaces, either, though I suppose they'll bring that up, too. Especially since all the policemen—"

"What about the policemen?" asked Flowers.

"A lot of them ate at that cafeteria across from the store. They saw the sign in the window, and by now I suppose the entire police force is wearing our shoelaces. *Was* wearing them, I mean. Some of them came in right after it started raining and made a big fuss. And then some men came from the District Attorney's office—"

"What *is* this all about?"

"I don't know. But we're all in

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a lot of trouble and he won't do anything about it."

"Vandenberg," Flowers called out. "How about hiring a lawyer and getting us out of here?"

"Lawyers?" Vandenberg echoed blankly.

It was Flowers who finally summoned a lawyer, an austere, gloomy-looking man with a long mournful face, horn-rimmed glasses, and gold teeth that seemed decidedly out of character. He also had the unlikely name of Ephraim Zomrigger. He conferred briefly with Flowers, made a noble but unsuccessful attempt to engage Vandenberg in conversation, and went off to try his luck with the police and the D.A.'s men.

"Shoelaces?" he said to Flowers when he returned. "Shoelaces aren't the big problem. There may be a fuss about them—there's al-

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ready a fuss about them. Wait until you see the evening papers. But your boss says he'll have some made that won't dissolve and he'll give two pairs for every pair of soluble ones you people have been passing out. I don't know how he'll work the exchange, but if he goes through with it, that part should be all right. No, the trouble is a matter of records."

"Records?" Flowers asked. "What records?"

"That's just what the District Attorney wants to know. What records. Your boss was served with a subpoena a week ago. Ordered to produce all his records. He says he hasn't got any. Can't get away with that sort of thing, you know. First thing he has to do is produce the records. If there's anything wrong with them, then—but he'll have to produce the records."

"Let's talk to him," Flowers said.

VANDENBERG listened and responded indifferently. Records? He had no records. What difference did that make?

"My word!" the lawyer exclaimed. "Why, it makes . . ." He removed his glasses and somehow managed to give the impression that he was getting a better look at Vandenberg. "My good sir, you are operating a business, New for Old, Incorporated. Do you own stock in the corporation yourself?"

"Stock?" Vandenberg said noncommittally. "What stock?"

"But if it's a corporation, there must be stock. There must be stockholders. Where is your list of stockholders?"

"What stockholders?" Vandenberg said.

The lawyer smiled weakly and tried again. "Let's see now. You are a corporation. You are incorporated under the laws of the state of . . ." He paused, his thin eyebrows arched expectantly.

Vandenberg did not complete the statement. "Don't understand," he said.

"But you can't be incorporated if you're not incorporated! I mean—"

"Just a name," Vandenberg said.

"It *can't* be just a name! If you want to call yourself incorporated, you must incorporate and . . ." He replaced his glasses and his eysight seemed to fail noticeably. He moved closer to Vandenberg. "You have employees. Certainly you have records on them."

"Twelve employees," Vandenberg said. "No records."

The lawyer removed his glasses and mopped his brow. "Payroll records?" he suggested.

"No."

"Of course you've been making the proper withholding tax deductions from your employees' salaries and forwarding them—"

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"No."

Zomrigger groped around for a chair and sat down heavily. "You had each one of your employees complete a Form W4. If an employee completed no such form, then you withheld his tax as if he had claimed no exemptions. You deducted the withholding tax from each employee's salary and forwarded it to—"

"No," Vandenberg said. "I deducted nothing from the salaries. Why should I take my employees' money?"

Zomrigger was breathing rapidly, his long face transfixed with horror. "Did you—did you apply on Form SS4 for an employer's identification number, and deduct social security taxes from your employees, and match them with a similar amount of your own money, and—"

"No."

"Federal and state unemployment taxes?"

"No."

"Did you clear your operations with the state retail sales tax people?"

FOR the first time, Vandenberg seemed interested. "What sort of thing is that?"

"Well, now—I couldn't say, without checking, whether or not it pertains to your operations. It depends on the retail value of your shoelaces, and since you are trading, rather than selling—but you should have cleared the operation with the retail sales tax people. They might hand you a whopping big bill if it turns out that—"

"Not selling anything," Vandenberg said. "Simple transaction—trading. Nobody's business but mine."

"What arrangements did you make about the retailer's excise tax on jewelry?"

"No arrangements. Trading shoelaces, not jewelry."

"But those shoelaces of yours. Some of them have gold and silver tips, haven't they? And artificial jewels? The government is certain to demand adjustments on the tax—I think. I haven't exactly had a case just like this one." He mopped his brow again. "Articles made of, or ornamented, mounted, or fitted with precious metals or imitations thereof have a tax that amounts to ten per cent of the sales price. Surely—"

Vandenberg shook his head slowly.

"Of course you filed your own personal income tax last April. That would be, in your case, Form 1040, with Schedule C, plus the self-employment tax, and a declaration of estimated tax of the current year if your gross income exceeds six hundred dollars for each of your exemptions plus four hundred dollars." He looked up hopefully.

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"No income," Vandenberg said. "Just old shoelaces. The government wants me to pay a tax on old shoelaces?"

"I forgot," said the lawyer. "You're an employee of a corporation. But then there are the corporation taxes—but no! You aren't incorporated. You just call yourself . . ." He slumped forward and buried his face in his hands. "Oh, my!" he moaned. He glanced at Flowers. "Didn't he deduct your withholding taxes or—"

"Nothing," Flowers said. "I never thought anything about it. It's kind of an unusual business, you know."

"It certainly is." The lawyer turned back to Vandenberg. "Did you file an income tax report last year? Or the year before that? Or the year—"

"Never," Vandenberg said.

"Oh, my!" The lawyer's glasses struck the floor with a thump, but did not shatter. He retrieved them and got slowly to his feet. "I'd better summon a few of my colleagues. This is going to be too much for one man to handle."

BY late evening, it was decided that the employees of New for Old, Incorporated, were innocent of wrongdoing. They were released. Vandenberg stubbornly shrugged off the efforts of his legal advisors, refused to answer questions, refused to post bond for his release. He was taken off without protest to jail.

In the morning, his cell was found inexplicably empty.

The F.B.I. and state and local police departments all over the country were alerted, but no trace of the fugitive was found.

Jeff Flowers got himself an honest job, at the two-dollar window of the local racetrack, and married Janet Star. They lived together happily ever after, or so the latest reports indicate. The day after the big rain, local stores did an avalanche of business in shoelaces, and sales of laceless shoes shot mysteriously upward.

The government took over the assets of New for Old, Incorporated, and found itself in possession of a room full of old shoelaces and several thousand gross of stylish new shoelaces which were mysteriously soluble in water. It never announced the disposition of this property. One local newspaper suggested that the new laces be turned over to the armed forces, for use in desert maneuvers; evidently the editorial writer had never worn combat boots and had no idea of how gay those laces would look in them.

General Vrooz, alias E. Vandenberg, left Earth. He also left the Moon and the Solar system. As he told his Sector Commander, there were other worlds to conquer where his efforts would be more

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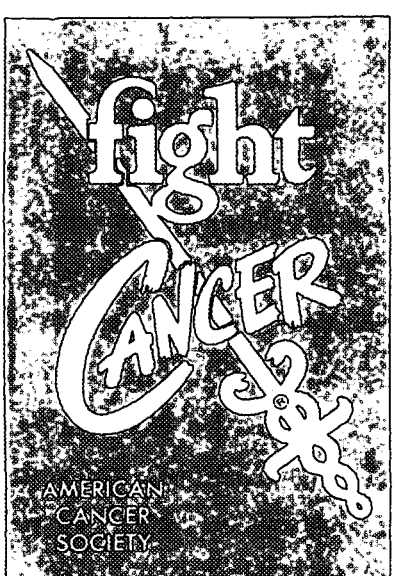
rewarding. Of course he is not forgetting Earth. He will be back—oh, most certainly he will be back—and on his next trip, he won't be trading shoelaces.

But as he stated in his final report, he could see no point in investing time, materials and energy in the sabotage of an economy which is already struggling feebly in the encircling grip of governmental red tape. In two or three flibs, the general wrote—the flib is his race's unit of temporal measure—the economy will die of self-strangulation and conquest will be a simple matter.

General Vrooz does not expect to wait long.

— LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.



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THE VOICE OF THE DIAPHRAGM

By RICHARD WILSON

Nostalgia is a time bomb—Harry fooled around with it and found his whole life blown to pieces!

Illustrated by JOHNSON

I: HE

HE fled from the television set, which had been depicting the horrors that could beset an intestinal tract while a Friendly Announcer held up a bottle not-quite-guaranteed to Relieve Distress.

He crept back later during a relatively inoffensive paean to some Indescribably delicious candy, which nevertheless was being described, and shut the set off.

He considered smashing it, but he abhorred excesses—and he'd only have to clean up the mess afterward.

He tried to read, but was unable to concentrate. The print jumped around the page and hurt his eyes. He wondered what was the matter with him. Could it be Tired Blood? He shuddered.

He roamed the apartment restlessly, half seeing all that had grown familiar over his twenty bachelor years there. Few things had changed.

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There was the gas fireplace he'd installed after a trip to England—it was *relatively* new. There was the morris chair he'd bought himself on his 45th birthday, not so long ago. He'd known exactly what he wanted—the kind with the push-button in the flat arm that raised or lowered the back, and the section in the base that slid out to provide a footrest. He'd persevered and found one in a Salvation Army resale store.

He sat down in it now. He put his head back and his feet up and averted his eyes from the television set, which it directly faced. That was *new*, of course.

He got up in irritation to turn the chair and the biggish end table with the radio on it, and sat down again.

SWITCHING on the radio — an old Atwater Kent he'd bought with the morris chair and lovingly restored — he waited in apprehension. He was ready to snap it off instantly if he heard the voice of that little girl shaming her mother into buying two-ply toilet tissue.

He relaxed as music welled out of the ancient speaker. Then, as if from the past, came the friendly, baffled voice of Jack Benny.

He was surprised until he remembered having read that transcriptions of old Benny programs were being brought back to radio.

He listened, pleased. Benny on television had always made him nervous. Being completely convinced of the legend that Benny was helpless without his writers, he was constantly afraid the perennial 39-year-old from Waukegan would forget his lines. He preferred the old Benny, in a radio studio, with his glasses on, secure with a script in front of him.

He turned the dial regretfully when the Benny show ended. His fingers froze on the knob as he heard the voice of Fred Allen. The late, great Allen? Had they transcribed him back from the Final Curtain? Allen's Sinoid voice was doing a One Long Pan skit. Ah, those days! The epic era of the Mighty Allen Art Players, with Portland Hoffa and Parker Fennelly and Mrs. Nussbaum. Bless them and their pre-visual medium, which at least had left a few things to the imagination.

He listened blissfully and did not even mind when the Merry Macs sang their song. He'd always regretted the Merry Macs, who just didn't fit into the Allen pattern, and he felt intuitively that Fred did, too. You could tell from the way he introduced them, almost apologetically, as if saying he'd had to compromise with the sponsor. Then Allen, too, was gone.

He turned the dial hopefully, wondering what new magic his radio would evoke. Was it Old-

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timers Night, put together from hallowed tapes from some golden vault?

He lingered for a station break and heard the familiar chimes — then the almost forgotten call letters WEAF. Quickly, excitedly, he switched in time to hear another long-extinct letter group, WJZ.

He sat back in the morris chair, his heart palpitating a little. He had begun to believe that his Atwater Kent was bringing him these long-dead programs live.

He switched from band to band, thrilled as the boy with a crystal set he once had been, and heard Vic and Sade, Major Bowes, Myrt and Marge (he almost cried), The Goldbergs, Jack Pearl ("Vas you dere, Sharlie?"), Burns and Allen, Rudy Vallée, Stoopnagle and Budd (that crazy organ!), The Easy Aces, Snow Village Sketches, Ruth Etting, Joe Penner, Kate Smith, Frank Munn ("the golden voice of radio"), Ben Bernie, Raymond Knight ("the voice of the diaphragm enunciating") . . .

HE luxuriated in the sounds of the hallowed, half-forgotten voices, laughing at them, weeping with them, reveling in the once-dead past, questioning nothing. Only when midnight came, and station after station signed off (was that weak, indistinctly heard one KDKA?) did he allow himself to wonder.

He stilled the hum of dead [illegible] with a reluctant click. He stood and stretched, cramped but not sleepy. He thought, dreamily awake, not believing it: "I'm back in the past. I was happy then. I was young. Life was uncomplicated."

He corrected himself: "I *am* happy. I *am* young."

He laughed (softly, not to break the spell) and thought: "It's true. Who's to say it isn't? As long as I want it to be, it's true, here in this room, right now. As long as I don't look in the mirror—as long as I don't switch on the television."

He turned his back on the monstrous, futuristic television set, that anachronism in his return to—to when? The radio programs had been a mixed bag. Mostly they were from the 1930s (his twenties), but a few had been from the 1920s (even better!). No matter, he told himself. Don't question it. Don't doubt the voice of the diaphragm. Trust your Atwater Kent, your pre-transistor genie.

He heard something then, outside. A clatter-rumble in the distance. Clatter - rumble - screech. Louder. Closer. Clatter-rumble-screech-rattle. It was roaring by his window now, rattling past with an infernal beloved din, a dozen feet away.

The Ninth Avenue El! Torn down years ago, of course, long before they doomed the Third

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Avenue El and even the Sixth. But there it was.

He saw its shadows on his drawn window shade. He rushed to raise the shade, then stopped himself.

"No," he thought. "If I look, it won't be there (yes, it will). I want it to be, but it isn't (yes, it is). I musn't look. I must accept it (I do). I must make an effort—meet it halfway, have faith. I must go out. Then it will be there (I know, I know)."

He went out the door and into the hall, down the stairs to the vestibule. He saw his name in the slot of the mailbox.

The letters he had typed so many years ago were fresh and unsmudged.

He stepped out through the street door and into the earlier time, the blood coursing youthfully in his veins.

II: She

SHE was out late. It was a necessary inconvenience. She endured the suspicious glances of patrolmen, the oglings of hopeful but faint-hearted young men, the frank approaches of others.

She had to consider them all. One of them must be the right one. This was the neighborhood. Hell's Kitchen. Somewhere here, west of Times Square, under the El or near the tracks on Death Avenue, she would recognize her man. Her memory of how it would be was dim. She wished she had paid more attention at the time. But she had been in a hurry to go. There had been so many exciting vistas that she'd skimmed a few details. It was her own fault. She'd been warned.

She slung her fox furpiece over her shoulder and walked on. A man came out of a bar and fell into step beside her. She looked at him sideways. He wasn't the one. She could tell.

She said, "I live in the next block and my brother's still up. He weighs two hundred pounds."

She looked straight ahead, but knew he had dropped back and would leave her alone.

She turned the corner. At the end of the long block, an El train rattled past.

She walked quickly, her high heels sending echoes back from the brownstones, the tail of the fox flapping against her back.

She hoped without real hope that this would be the night. How many nights had it been? It didn't really matter (it would come to the same thing in the end), except that she was tired and wanted to go back. Her curiosity had been satisfied over and over. She was sorry now that she had come, though she knew she would not be—then. But now was not then. Now was now, and her feet hurt.

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She would know him, though. Let it be at the corner, under the El, tonight. This was the area. This could be the time. (But what was time? Very inexact, time.)

She saw the cop before he saw her and adjusted her walk to a purposeful stride. She thought: "It's all right, officer—I'm walking the streets of your city, but I'm no streetwalker." The cop passed, swinging his nightstick, with just the suggestion of a nod. A good girl going home, that's what she was. Oh, Lord, would she ever get home?

She made herself think Yes. Yes, she would, tonight, under the El. She'd find him there and she'd know him. There'd be something about him that would tell her. His clothes, perhaps, though men's clothes didn't change as much over the years. His attitude, more likely. Something she'd recognize.

She turned at the corner, toward the El station at the next block. There he was! A man, standing half in shadow. She walked toward him quickly. It wasn't his clothes so much as his indecisiveness that convinced her that he was *her* man. He was standing at the foot of the steps leading to the El platform, looking at a handful of coins.

She hurried and stopped beside him, close. He looked up, confused. She already had the coins in her own hand.

She said to him, smiling in relief, "No buffalo nickels? Only Jeffersons?"

She saw him start, smile, then cancel the smile and withdraw into propriety. But he was the one. He was! She knew it as she watched him take courage and say, tentatively, doubtfully, daringly, "Would you take a Roosevelt dime, miss, for two buffalo nickels?"

III: They

THEY waited on the dimly lit platform for the downtown train. He started to speak, then hesitated. She smiled, encouraging him.

"How could you know about Roosevelt dimes?" he asked finally. "He wasn't—isn't even President yet. FDR, I mean. Wouldn't he still be Governor of New York?"

She shrugged carelessly. "I'm no good at current events. It's one of my failings."

He had been studying her in polite glances. "You're not from here," he said, "though your clothing's right. The skirt length, the hat—all that. How did you get here?" He laughed. "I don't even know what year it is. It was too dark to see the license plates without being conspicuous—you know, bending down. And there weren't any newsstands open or I'd have bought a paper."

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"You don't need a paper," she said.

There was a gum machine on a pillar and he stooped a bit to look in its mirror. He was young, all right. About her age, he judged.

She laughed. "You're being conspicuous now."

"I don't mind—with you. How old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Then I'd like to be 25. I was born in 1911, so if I'm 25, this is 1936. Is that right?"

She shrugged again. "It doesn't matter. Everything is relative in the duoverse."

"In the what?"

The train rattled in, drowning her reply. They took seats in the nearly empty car.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Now? South Ferry, I guess. That's where the train goes, it said on the sign."

"There's a paper over there." She nodded toward it across the aisle. "You could check the date."

"I don't really want to now," he said. "I—I wouldn't want to push it too far."

"No such thing. But suit yourself. I can understand it."

"Can you really? I was listening to the radio—it's an old one—because I was mad at the television—" He stopped. "You know what television is?"

"Yes."

"Of course. You know about Roosevelt dimes and Jefferson nickels."

She nodded. "You were telling me about the radio—steeping yourself in the past."

"I didn't say that." He turned to look at her. She was dark and pretty. He wondered what her name was.

"No, but that's the way it happens."

"It happened to you, too?"

"Not exactly," she said. "I planned it. I'd guess that you didn't."

"No. It just happened. What's your name?"

"April."

He laughed.

"Funny?" she asked.

"Yes. Not your name—the coincidence. Your name is April and mine is Summers. Harry Summers."

"I see. Hello, Harry." She shook his hand gravely.

"Hello, April." He looked into her brown eyes as the train banged along through the past. "Where are you going, April?"

"I'll go with you while you do your sightseeing. Then I'll go home with you."

"Oh?" He seemed surprised and embarrassed.

She dropped her eyes. "It's all right," she said. "It's—"

"Of course it is. I'd like you to."

But he didn't want to go home

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—home where the TV was—home where he was 46. Home where the TV was, would she be 45?

"Don't worry about anything, Harry." She seemed to be reassuring him. "Enjoy yourself. That's what you came back for. You're happier here, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said, looking at her. "Yes, I am."

Their hands were still clasped.

STANDING close together at the rail of the Staten Island ferry (two more buffalo nickels), they watched the phosphorescent water. Something was nagging him.

"I'm really here?" he urged. "I mean *really* here?"

She squeezed his arm. "What do you think?"

"I don't know. Here—now. Could I meet myself? If I went looking, could I find the other Harry Summers — the one who's living through 1936 the first time?"

"No," she said. A freighter hooted mournfully at the ferryboat. "You're the only Harry Summers in this 1936."

"*This* 1936? Is that what you meant by—what did you call it—the duoverse?"

"Yes. But you mustn't think I understand everthing I can name. I do know that you couldn't be here — nor could I — unless there were something controlling the paradoxes. That's the duoverse—a twin universe to keep time travelers from running into themselves. It's actually just a theory, but it seems to work."

They were silent for a while, watching the wake of the freighter moving up the harbor. The air was fresh but not cold and her closeness made him wish the ride would never end.

"I'm so glad I found you," he whispered.

"I'm glad I found you. I'd been looking for so long."

His heart thumped at her words. He drew her head down to his shoulder and she let it rest there.

He touched her cheek gently. "Let's not lose what we've found. Let's keep it forever."

She didn't move. She said, as if to the dark sky, "And thou beside me under the branches of the time-tree . . . Something like that? Oh, Harry!"

She turned and was in his arms. They kissed and her tears trickled to their lips.

Then she was her separate self again, gripping the rail with both hands.

"It's impossible, Harry. I'm going the other way."

THEY were at his front door. There were signs of dawn through the steel latticework of the El above them.

"We haven't done much sightseeing in your beloved past," April said. "We haven't seen the Hip-

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podrome, or the streetcars on Broadway—"

"You're all the past I want."

She smiled sadly. "Let's go up. I said I'd go home with you."

"I don't want it to be that way," he said. "Not only that way."

"That's the way it has to be. There's no other."

"But up there, I'm — I'm 46. And you—"

"Not till you turn on the TV, Harry. Not till then. Let's go up, Harry."

He put the key in the lock. He took her fox and she made coffee in the kitchenette.

"I might have known you'd have real coffee," she said. "No millions of tiny flavor buds for you, eh, Old-timer?"

"I don't have the room," he smiling at his little joke.

They sat and drank their coffee formally, she in his morris chair, he next to her in a straight chair, neither facing the blank square eye of the television set.

He started to say something once, but an El train roared past, just outside his drawn shade, and she didn't hear him.

Finally she said, "Thank you for the coffee—and for everything else."

She placed the cup carefully in its saucer on the flat arm of the chair and stood up.

"You're not going! You can't! Please!"

"I must. I've a long way to go. Turn on the TV, please."

"No!" He stood to face her. "I won't do that to you. I won't make you old."

"You don't understand." She moved toward the television set, but he moved in front of her.

"Please," he said desperately. "Wait. It's too early. There's nothing on."

"I *have* waited, Harry. You don't know how long."

There was the rumble of another El train approaching, and as his eyes went to the window, she darted past him. She flicked the knob and turned the volume button high. The rumble grew louder. The train was less than a block away. The room-rattling din drowned the hum of the warming tubes.

He stood as if in a trance, looking from her to the window and back again.

"April . . ."

The voice of the television was heard before there was a picture: "And now, kiddies, it's time for your Uncle Jack to tell you about a wonderful surprise you can have the next time your mommy takes you to the grocery store . . . "

And with the coming of the voice, the sound of the El died.

OUTSIDE the window, Harry knew without going to raise the shade, was the wide, one-

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way, truck-choked, El-less Ninth Avenue of 1957.

And he, in 1957, was 46. He knew it without a mirror to tell him. He felt it in his sagging muscles and aching feet. And April was 45. He turned from the window, but not easily.

She was unchanged. She was fresh and lovely, untouched by the years which, flowing back in an instant, had plunged back at him in a tidal wave.

April turned off the set just as Uncle Jack began to take shape holding a breakfast food box and pointing to it with his right index finger. "Kiddies . . . "

"You're the same," Harry said. "It *is* 1957 and I'm 46 and you're still 24. Why?"

"I told you we were going different ways. Your way was back. Mine was forward. Oh, my dear, I'm sorry. But I had to—to use you. I had no choice."

He straightened his shoulders, tried to pull in his stomach.

"You've come back from the past," he said, trying to understand. "But you should have been a child in 1936 — a three-year-old child."

"I wish — " she began, had to stop. "Oh, how I wish I didn't have to hurt you. But I'm not from your past, or even your present. I'm from the future."

"The future — " He had to sit down. His finger accidentally pushed the button in the arm of the morris chair and it sprang up and hit him in the back.

"Then," he said, pain in his eyes, "I'm just a stop on your journey. Where you're going, I'm — dead."

"No, Harry." She went to kneel at his feet. "Oh, no. It's all relative. You must see that. It's what you are *now* that matters. Not what will be, or what was."

He looked at her, then looked away. "Don't try to be kind. I know I hoped for too much. I wanted my youth and I wanted you — and I couldn't have both." His gaze came to rest on the television set. "I can't have either."

SHE touched his hand. "It was to have been so simple, so scientific. I was to go back — they have machines — and make notes and saturate myself in the atmosphere of the past — Oh, it doesn't matter! You're what counts. I've hurt you and I didn't mean to — "

He took the hand that had touched his. "I don't matter," he said. "Not a bit. I'm just a phantom in your life — in your real present. Where you belong, I'm just a corpse in a graveyard and you're too young to think about such things."

She shook her head and started to cry.

"No," he said, "let me finish. We have to be realistic. I'm just a complicating factor who's got in your way. I mustn't let myself do

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that. And you mustn't concern yourself with someone who doesn't exist any more in your time. I'll be happy if you'll think of me occasionally up there in twenty-hundred and whatever it is."

She had pressed the back of his hand, holding hers, to her wet cheek.

He managed a wry smile. "It would be a personal kind of thought that no other corpse could boast of."

"Harry!" she cried. "Harry — please stop it. Don't kill yourself in your own lifetime. I'll stay with you, my dear. I will. I don't care. I can't do this to you."

He shook his head. "No, I won't let you. I'm a sentimental man who's been privileged to know his youth again. And, knowing that youth, I know yours. I won't let you sacrifice yourself for a phantom who died before you were even born."

She was sobbing on his knee.

"Get up, child," he commanded. "Up! Go into the bathroom and wash your face. Off with that lipstick—cupid's bows are passé. We'll make you up 1957 style."

She wiped her eyes and got to her feet, sniffling.

"Scoot!" he said, feeling paternal all at once and not minding his age at all. "You've got to get fixed up and find somebody who needs change for a Truman quarter or maybe an Eisenhower half." He touched one of her new tears with a fingertip. "You'll forgive my vanity if I hope that this time it's a woman who wants change."

She sobbed again, then kissed him on the cheek and went in and washed her face.

IV: He

HE had watched from the window as she went out of his life, blowing him a kiss from the corner. She had slept in his bed as he dozed in the morris chair (back down, footrest out; quite comfortable, really) and now, regretting nothing, he changed into pajamas and snuggled into the sheets still fragrant from her perfume.

He slept, dreaming not of the past, which was dead, nor of the present, which was dying, but of the future, her future, which would live when he was dust.

V: She

SHE knew before the day was spent that she was tired of her journey back through time. The world of 2012 was no improvement, except mechanistically. She had never found love there.

She turned into Ninth Avenue at dusk and in her mind she heard the phantom clatter and rattle of the El.

She knew what she would do. She would wait at the vestibule

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till someone came out. Then she would go up the stairs to his door and knock.

"Hello, my dearest," she would say. "Hello, my darling Harry. I love you."

And if they only watched television for all the years of their lives, that would be all right, as long as he held her hand. But one night they might turn on the old Atwater Kent and hear the Street Singer or Jones and Hare (The Happiness Boys) and find the program being drowned out by the roar of the Ninth Avenue El banging and rattling its way through the time when he was 25 and she was 24.

— RICHARD WILSON

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Next month's issue brings along a name new to this field and returns at least one established favorite . . .

Remember "The Hated" by Paul Flehr, one of the grimmest little shockers of the year? New name Flehr follows it up with MARS BY MOONLIGHT, a searingly illuminated novella of a place that is assuredly not nice to visit and decidedly worse to live in. Certainly the inhabitants are criminals — they are in a Martian penal colony. But what were their crimes — and how much time do they have to serve? Of all forms of punishment, the direst is to keep such knowledge from inmates, forcing them into tormented self-examination and frantic guesswork. But something even more sinister is added . . . What happened to the years between their unremembered crimes and the moment they found themselves in this camp of the damned?

In a powerful novelet, established name Robert Sheckley tells of THE MINIMUM MAN, the least likely candidate for a cosmic dilemma. Perceveral has a nerve asking for nothing more than his own little cubicle and a bit to eat . . . he'll take the whole world or else!

Along with probably another novelet and definitely several short stories and our regular features, Willy Ley presents, FOR YOUR INFORMATION, perhaps the most unexpected bulletin you might think to discover in this level-headed journal. Yes, there's *News of Atlantis* . . . and, being sober and authenticated, it's far more exciting than the hottest flash from the most inventive cultist!

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE THIRD LEVEL by Jack Finney. Rinehart & Co., Inc., N. Y., $3.00

THIS desirable item, Finney's first collection of short stories, can stand up proudly to the best of the recent crop. Although time-travel is the theme of most of these yarns from the pages of *Colliers, Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping,* his treatment gamuts from the sinister to the hilarious.

The other works include offbeat love stories, ghost tales and unclassifiable zanies.

The wonderfully titled "Quit Zoomin' Those Hands Through the Air" is the mad story of the world's first pilot and how he almost won the Civil War — for the enemy.

A lovely shorty, "Cousin Len's Wonderful Adjective Cellar," is a pure delight and a lesson to overflowery authors.

Don't miss this book. Finney is one slick writer who is more than a slick trickster.

OCCAM'S RAZOR by David Duncan. Ballantine Books, N. Y., $2.00

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DUNCAN has taken a theme that was hot news in SF a quarter century ago, that of parallel universes, and by the mere addition of refreshing originality of concept has woven an absorbing yarn.

His locus is Santa Felicia Island in the Caribbean, taken over by the Navy for a top-secret project, Lunar One, based on the "Homing Pigeon," a guided missile. On an earlier test, one passed close to the Moon, indicated mineral deposits, and led to the thought of homing on such deposits with supply drones, followed eventually by men.

During the course of a lecture on minimals given to the younger officers by the lanky, maladjusted civilian scientist, Staghorn, demonstrative soap films created by the wire-test forms develop an impossibility. Supposedly two-dimensional Moebius surfaces, they should be dispelled by only two pin pricks. However, one effort requires three, causing Staghorn to consult with the base psychiatrist concerning his sanity. Later, large-scale experiments by Staghorn in his laboratory result in a dimensional breakthrough that introduces a beguiling couple into the story and a universal time-lapse that sets the world on the verge of war.

Duncan's portrayal of the frustrating ability of Security to fit square pegs into round holes rings too unhappily true.

S-F '57 THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, edited by Judith Merril. Gnome Press, N. Y., $3.95

MISS Merril's second annual anthology follows unerringly the path set by her first.

It ranges from excellence to mediocrity — from Sturgeon's "The Other Man" and Knight's "Stranger Station" to "The Damnedest Thing" by Garson Kanin, of interest solely because of its author.

"Put Them All Together, They Spell Monster" by the editor of *Playboy*, Ray Russell, is a biting spoof of Hollywood's conception of SF. And see if you don't cock an askance eye at our present-day haphazards after reading Robert Nathan's "Digging the Weans," a learned archeological paper of the future theorizing on the meanings of our remains.

Remembering that "Best" is at best a superlative comparative, let's just agree that the average is "Good."

EARTHMAN'S BURDEN by Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson. Gnome Press, N. Y., $3.00

READ singly and between sufficient time lapses, "The Tiddlywink Warriors," "In Hoka

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Signo Vinces" and "Adventure of the Misplaced Hound" are all reasonably amusing. Under one cover and in company with minor works, though, the cumulative effect is less rewarding.

The Hokans of planet Toka are lovable, teddy-bearish creatures with overdeveloped imaginations and underdeveloped discrimination. They are being groomed for planetary autonomy but, still Neolithic culturally, they love to ape fictional environments and characters.

Plenipotentiary Alex Jones has his hands full each time a batch of novels is landed. In rapid succession, the American West, Victorian England, the Spanish Main, to name a few, are the locales of anachronistic action.

Hoka, like pickles, is a tasty appetizer in moderation, but leaves a characteristic taste if overindulged.

THE MYSTERIOUS MACHINE by Glen Dines. The Macmillan Co., N. Y., $2.75

JERRY Barnes, Dines' eleven-year-old Scientist/Inventor, has a penchant for inventing fast-moving things like rockets, jet-propelled wagons, etc. However, his talents remain unappreciated until W. H. Lankersham, Esq., comes to town in a remarkable car that opens into a five-room apartment and announces his contemplated construction of a Mysterious Machine. Jerry is of considerable help, particularly in supplying the speed of sound.

Dines' imagination runs amusingly riot and his own illustrations help sustain the fun.

RUSTY'S SPACE SHIP by Evelyn Sibley Lampman. Doubleday and Co., N. Y., $2.95

MRS. Lampman's charming juvenile is an account of the efforts of a fantastically inept extraterrestrial messenger to return an errant flying saucer to his ruler. Rusty Adams came across it, a circular plate of metal, in the dump, and found that it would just cover the nose of his egg-crate, orange-box spaceship.

Though successfully resisting the efforts of the three-foot-high, toothless reptilian messenger, Tiphia, to remove the saucer, Rusty and his friends nonetheless fall victim to candy-from-a-stranger. Before they can suspect, Tiphia has activated the saucer and they are Moonward bound. The candies have the extraordinary power to immunize them to space environment. Unfortunately, Tiphia's poor memory can't recall his home satellite's location, necessitating a Systemwide search.

Mrs. Lampman writes like Lewis Carroll brought up to date,

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and Bernard Krigstein is a wistfully humorous Tenniel. An irresistible combination.

MYSTERIES OF SCIENCE by John Rowland. Philosophical Library, N. Y., $6.00

ROWLAND'S subtitle reads "A Study of the Limitations of the Scientific Method." You can see without half looking that he is a skeptic. He takes to task those in any of the sciences who run to dogma in their explanations of phenomena, particularly the theoretical physicists and the super-Darwinian biologists. His tenet is that we do not destroy mysteries by denying them existence.

The book has five subdivisions covering unsolved mysteries of Physics; Biology; Psychology; Sociology; and The Unclassifiable, and is certain to massage the gray matter into cerebration.

HIDDEN WORLD by Stanton A. Coblentz. Avalon Books, N. Y.
TWICE IN TIME by Manly Wade Wellman. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.75 each

AVALON is a new name in the SF publishing field, but the above titles are familiar to the old-time aficionado.

Hidden World, a lead-fisted satire, first saw light in 1935. It concerns two geologists, trapped in a mine cave-in, burrowing into a hidden world of two rival troglodytic nations, Wu and Zu, scientific marvels but with social systems strictly from Coblentz. Its take-offs on sitdown strikes, Roosevelt's fishing trips and technocracy date it almost to the hour.

On the other hand, Wellman's yarn, though published only five years later, stands the test of time remarkably well. It is the equal of any science-adventure yarn of today, though his time reflector is a bit thick. But, once back in Renaissance Italy, his yarn spins along in sprightly style, even though the sock ending has been telegraphed since page twenty.

THE MAN WHO REACHED THE MOON by Roscoe Fleming. Golden Bell Press, Denver, $3.00

SF has inspired many poetic efforts, but most writers have incorporated their rhymes into the story's body. Few have, like Fleming, issued a volume of poetry alone. The title poem is one of the shortest of a number of arresting works on SF themes. There are mundane poems also, but Fleming makes an imposing bid for the vacant title of Poet Laureate of SF in this oftentimes inspiring volume.

— FLOYD C. GALE

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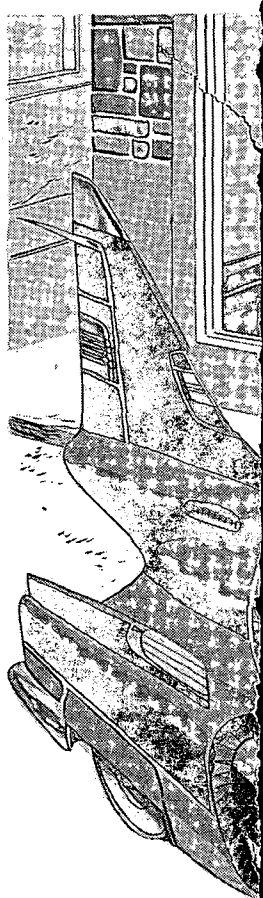
Family longs to lose weight, can't control appetite? Simply trade in the old robocook, put the whole problem in the firm hands of

The Iron Chancellor

By ROBERT SILVERBERG



THE Carmichaels were a pretty plump family, to begin with. Not one of the four of them couldn't stand to shed quite a few pounds. And there happened to be a super-special on roboservitors at one of the Miracle Mile roboshops — 40% off on the 2061 model, with adjustable caloric-intake monitors.

Sam Carmichael liked the idea of having his food prepared and served by a robot who would keep one beady solenoid eye on the collective family waistline. He squinted speculatively at the glossy display model, absent-mindedly

Illustrated by WOOD

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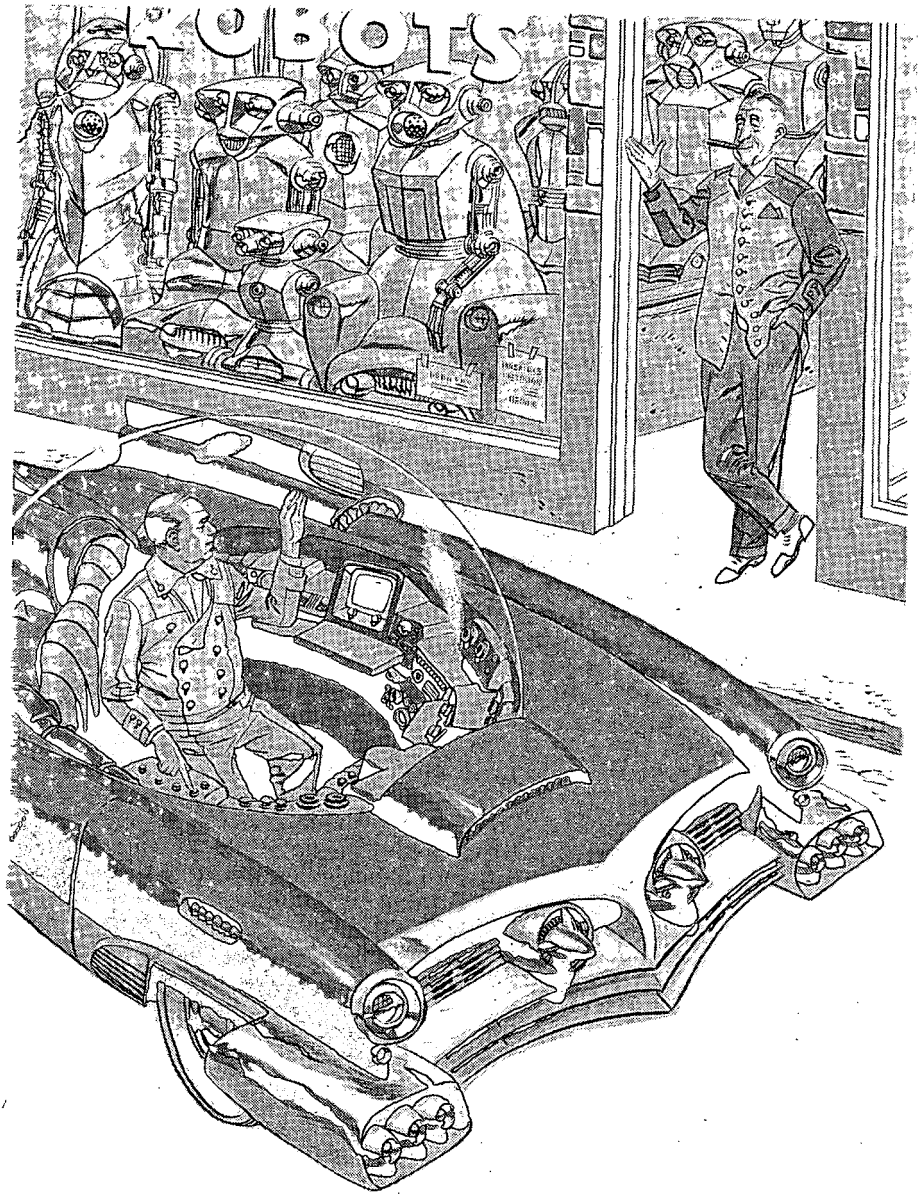

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slipped his thumbs beneath his elastobelt to knead his paunch, and said, "How much?"

The salesman flashed a brilliant and probably synthetic grin. "Only 2995, sir. That includes free service contract for the first five years. Only 200 credits down and up to 40 months to pay."

Carmichael frowned, thinking of his bank balance. Then he thought of his wife's figure, and of his daughter's endless yammering about her need to diet. Besides, Jemima, their old robocook, was shabby and gear-stripped, and made a miserable showing when other company executives visited them for dinner.

"I'll take it," he said.

"Care to trade in your old robocook, sir? Liberal trade-in allowances—"

"I have a '43 Madison." Carmichael wondered if he should mention its bad arm-libration and serious fuel-feed overflow, but decided that would be carrying candidness too far.

"Well — ah — I guess we could allow you fifty credits on a '43, sir. Seventy-five, maybe, if the recipe bank is still in good condition."

"Excellent condition." That part was honest—the family had never let even one recipe wear out. "You could send a man down to look her over."

"Oh, no need to do that, sir. We'll take your word. Seventy-five, then? And delivery of the new model by this evening?"

"Done," Carmichael said. He was glad to get the pathetic old '43 out of the house at any cost.

HE signed the purchase order cheerfully, pocketed the facsim and handed over ten crisp twenty-credit vouchers. He could almost feel the roll of fat melting from him now, as he eyed the magnificent '61 roboservitor that would shortly be his.

The time was only 1810 hours when he left the shop, got into his car and punched out the coordinates for home. The whole transaction had taken less than ten minutes. Carmichael, a second-level executive at Normandy Trust, prided himself both on his good business sense and his ability to come quickly to a firm decision.

Fifteen minutes later, his car deposited him at the front entrance of their totally detached self-powered suburban home in the fashionable Westley subdivision. The car obediently took itself around back to the garage, while Carmichael stood in the scanner-field until the door opened. Clyde, the robutler, came scuttling hastily up, took his hat and cloak, and handed him a Martini.

Carmichael beamed appreciatively. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!"

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He took a healthy sip and headed toward the living room to greet his wife, son and daughter. Pleasant gin-induced warmth filtered through him. The robutler was ancient and due for replacement as soon as the budget could stand the charge, but Carmichael realized he would miss the clanking old heap.

"You're late, dear," Ethel Carmichael said as he appeared. "Dinner's been ready for ten minutes. Jemima's so annoyed, her cathodes are clicking."

"Jemima's cathodes fail to interest me," Carmichael said evenly. "Good evening, dear. Myra. Joey. I'm late because I stopped off at Marhew's on my way home."

His son blinked. "The *robot* place, Dad?"

"Precisely. I brought a '61 roboservitor to replace old Jemima and her sputtering cathodes. The new model has," Carmichael added, eying his son's adolescent bulkiness and the rather-more-than-ample figures of his wife and daughter, "some very special attachments."

THEY dined well that night, on Jemima's favorite Tuesday dinner menu — shrimp cocktail, fumet of gumbo chervil, breast of chicken with creamed potatoes and asparagus, delicious plum tarts for dessert, and coffee. Carmichael felt pleasantly bloated when he had finished, and gestured to Clyde for a snifter of his favorite after-dinner digestive aid, VSOP Cognac. He leaned back, warm, replete, able easily to ignore the blustery November winds outside.

A pleasing electroluminescence suffused the dining room with pink — this year, the experts thought pink improved digestion — and the heating filaments embedded in the wall glowed cozily as they delivered the BTUs. This was the hour for relaxation in the Carmichael household.

"Dad," Joey began hesitantly, "about that canoe trip next weekend—"

Carmichael folded his hands across his stomach and nodded. "You can go, I suppose. Only be careful. If I find out you didn't use the equilibriator this time—"

The doorchime sounded. Carmichael lifted an eyebrow and swiveled in his chair.

"Who is it, Clyde?"

"He gives his name as Robinson, sir. Of Robinson Robotics, he said. He has a bulky package to deliver."

"It must be that new robocook, Father!" Myra Carmichael exclaimed.

"I guess it is. Show him in, Clyde."

Robinson turned out to be a red-faced, efficient-looking little man in greasy green overalls and a plaid pullovercoat, who looked

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disapprovingly at the robutler and strode into the Carmichael living room.

He was followed by a lumbering object about seven feet high, mounted on a pair of rolltreads and swathed completely in quilted rags.

"Got him all wrapped up against the cold, Mr. Carmichael. Lot of delicate circuitry in that job. You ought to be proud of him."

"Clyde, help Mr. Robinson unpack the new robocook," Carmichael said.

"That's okay—I can manage it. And it's *not* a robocook, by the way. It's called a roboservitor now. Fancy price, fancy name."

CARMICHAEL heard his wife mutter, "Sam, how much—"

He scowled at her. "Very reasonable, Ethel. Don't worry so much."

He stepped back to admire the roboservitor as it emerged from the quilted swaddling. It was big, all right, with a massive barrel of a chest — robotic controls are always housed in the chest, not in the relatively tiny head — and a gleaming mirror-keen finish that accented its sleekness and newness. Carmichael felt the satisfying glow of pride in ownership. Somehow it seemed to him that he had done something noble and lordly in buying this magnificent robot.

Robinson finished the unpacking job and, standing on tiptoes, opened the robot's chest panel. He unclipped a thick instruction manual and handed it to Carmichael, who stared at the tome uneasily.

"Don't fret about that, Mr. Carmichael. This robot's no trouble to handle. The book's just part of the trimming. Come here a minute."

Carmichael peered into the robot's innards. Pointing, Robinson said, "Here's the recipe bank — biggest and best ever designed. Of course it's possible to tape in any of your favorite family recipes, if they're not already there. Just hook up your old robocook to the integrator circuit and feed 'em in. I'll take care of that before I leave."

"And what about the — ah — special features?"

"The reducing monitors, you mean? Right over here. See? You just tape in the names of the members of the family and their present and desired weights, and the roboservitor takes care of the rest. Computes caloric intake, adjusts menus, and everything else."

Carmichael grinned at his wife. "Told you I was going to do something about our weight, Ethel. No more dieting for you, Myra—the robot does all the work." Catching a sour look on his son's face, he added, "And you're not so lean yourself, Buster."

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"I don't think there'll be any trouble," Robinson said buoyantly. "But if there is, just buzz for me. I handle service and delivery for Marhew Stores in this area."

"Right."

"Now if you'll get me your obsolete robocook, I'll transfer the family recipes before I cart it away on the trade-in deal."

THERE was a momentary tingle of nostalgia and regret when Robinson left, half an hour later, taking old Jemima with him. Carmichael had almost come to think of the battered '43 Madison as a member of the family. After all, he had bought her sixteen years before, only a couple of years after his marriage.

But she — *it*, he corrected in annoyance — was only a robot, and robots became obsolete. Besides, Jemima probably suffered all the aches and pains of a robot's old age and would be happier dismantled. Carmichael blotted Jemima from his mind.

The four of them spent most of the rest of that evening discovering things about their new roboservitor. Carmichael drew up a table of their weights (himself, 192; Ethel, 145; Myra, 139; Joey, 189) and the amount they proposed to weigh in three months' time (himself, 180; Ethel, 125; Myra, 120; Joey, 175). Carmichael then let his son, who prided himself on his knowledge of practical robotics, integrate the figures and feed them to the robot's programming bank.

"You wish this schedule to take effect immediately?" the roboservitor queried in a deep, mellow bass.

Startled, Carmichael said, "T-tomorrow morning, at breakfast. We might as well start right away."

"He speaks well, doesn't he?" Ethel asked.

"He sure does," Joey said. "Jemima always stammered and squeaked, and all she could say was, 'Dinner is serrved' and 'Be careful, sirr, the soup plate is verry warrm'."

Carmichael smiled. He noticed his daughter admiring the robot's bulky frame and sleek bronze limbs, and thought resignedly that a seventeen-year-old girl could find the strangest sorts of love objects. But he was happy to see that they were all evidently pleased with the robot. Even with the discount and the trade-in, it *had* been a little on the costly side.

But it would be worth it.

CARMICHAEL slept soundly and woke early, anticipating the first breakfast under the new regime. He still felt pleased with himself.

Dieting had always been such a nuisance, he thought — but, on the other hand, he had never enjoyed the sensation of an annoying

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roll of fat pushing outward against his elastobelt. He exercised sporadically, but it did little good, and he never had the initiative to keep a rigorous dieting campaign going for long. Now, though, with the mathematics of reducing done effortlessly for him, all the calculating and cooking being handled by the new robot — now, for the first time since he had been Joey's age, he could look forward to being slim and trim once again.

He dressed, showered and hastily depilated. It was 0730. Breakfast was ready.

Ethel and the children were already at the table when he arrived. Ethel and Myra were munching toast; Joey was peering at a bowl of milkless dry cereal, next to which stood a full glass of milk. Carmichael sat down.

"Your toast, sir," the roboservitor murmured.

Carmichael stared at the single slice. It had already been buttered for him, and the butter had evidently been measured out with a micrometer. The robot proceeded to hand him a cup of black coffee.

He groped for the cream and sugar. They weren't anywhere on the table. The other members of his family were regarding him strangely, and they were curiously, suspiciously silent.

"I like cream and sugar in my coffee," he said to the hovering roboservitor. "Didn't you find that in Jemima's old recipe bank?"

"Of course, sir. But you must learn to drink your coffee without such things, if you wish to lose weight."

Carmichael chuckled. Somehow he had not expected the regimen to be quite like this — quite so, well, Spartan. "Oh, yes. Of course. Ah— are the eggs ready yet?" He considered a day incomplete unless he began it with soft-boiled eggs.

"Sorry, no, sir. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, breakfast is to consist of toast and black coffee *only*, except for Master Joey, who gets cereal, fruit juice and milk."

"I — see."

Well, he had asked for it. He shrugged and took a bite of the toast. He sipped the coffee; it tasted like river mud, but he tried not to make a face.

Joey seemed to be going about the business of eating his cereal rather oddly, Carmichael noticed next. "Why don't you pour that glass of milk *into* the cereal?" he asked. "Won't it taste better that way?"

"Sure it will. But Bismarck says I won't get another glass if I do, so I'm eating it this way."

"Bismarck?"

JOEY grinned. "It's the name of a famous 19th-century German dictator. They called him the Iron Chancellor." He jerked his

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toward the kitchen, to which roboservitor had silently re-eated. "Pretty good name for him, eh?"

"No," said Carmichael. "It's silly."

"It has a certain ring of truth, though," Ethel remarked.

Carmichael did not reply. He finished his toast and coffee somewhat glumly and signaled Clyde to get the car out of the garage. He felt depressed — dieting didn't seem to be so effortless after all, even with the new robot.

As he walked toward the door, the robot glided around him and handed him a small printed slip of paper. Carmichael stared at it. It said:

FRUIT JUICE
LETTUCE & TOMATO SALAD
(ONE) HARD-BOILED EGG
BLACK COFFEE

"What's this thing?"

"You are the only member of this family group who will not be eating three meals a day under my personal supervision. This is your luncheon menu. Please adhere to it," the robot said smoothly.

Repressing a sputter, Carmichael said, "Yes — yes. Of course."

He pocketed the menu and made his way uncertainly to the waiting car.

He was faithful to the robot's orders at lunchtime that day; even though he was beginning to develop resistance to the idea that had seemed so appealing only the night before, he was willing, at least, to give it a try.

But something prompted him to stay away from the restaurant where Normandy Trust employees usually lunched, and where there were human waiters to smirk at him and fellow executives to ask prying questions.

He ate instead at a cheap robocafeteria two blocks to the north. He slipped in surreptitiously with his collar turned up, punched out his order (it cost him less than a credit altogether) and wolfed it down. He still felt hungry when he was finished, but he compelled himself to return loyally to the office.

He wondered how long he was going to be able to keep up this iron self-control. Not very long, he realized dolefully. And if anyone from the company caught him eating at a robocafeteria, he'd be a laughing-stock. Someone of executive status just *didn't* eat lunch by himself in mechanized cafeterias.

BY the time he had finished his day's work, his stomach felt knotted and pleated. His hand was shaky as he punched out his destination on the car's autopanel, and he was thankful that it took less than an hour to get home from the office. Soon, he thought, he'd be

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tasting food again. Soon. Soon. He switched on the roof-mounted video, leaned back in the recliner and tried to relax as the car bore him homeward.

He was in for a surprise, though, when he stepped through the safety field into his home. Clyde was waiting as always, and, as always, took his hat and cloak. And, as always, Carmichael reached out for the cocktail that Clyde prepared nightly to welcome him home.

There was no cocktail.

"Are we out of gin, Clyde?"

"No, sir."

"How come no drink, then?"

The robot's rubberized metallic features seemed to droop. "Because, sir, a Martini's caloric content is inordinately high. Gin is rated at a hundred calories per ounce and—"

"Oh, no. You too!"

"Pardon, sir. The new roboservitor has altered my responsive circuits to comply with the regulations now in force in this household."

Carmichael felt his fingers starting to tremble. "Clyde, you've been my butler for almost twenty years."

"Yes, sir."

"You always make my drinks for me. You mix the best Martinis in the Western Hemisphere."

"Thank you, sir."

"And you're going to mix one for me right now! That's a direct order!"

"Sir! I—" The robutler staggered wildly and nearly careened into Carmichael. It seemed to have lost all control over its gyro-balance; it clutched agonizedly at its chest panel and started to sag.

HASTILY, Carmichael barked, "Order countermanded! Clyde—are you all right?"

Slowly, and with a creak, the robot straightened up. It looked dangerously close to an overload. "Your direct order set up a first-level conflict in me, sir," Clyde whispered faintly. "I—came close to burning out just then, sir. May—may I be excused?"

"Of course. Sorry, Clyde." Carmichael balled his fists. There was such a thing as going too far! The roboservitor — Bismarck — had obviously placed on Clyde a flat prohibition against serving liquor to him. Reducing or no reducing, there were *limits*.

Carmichael strode angrily toward the kitchen.

His wife met him halfway. "I didn't hear you come in, Sam. I want to talk to you about—"

"Later. Where's that robot?"

"In the kitchen, I imagine. It's almost dinnertime."

He brushed past her and swept on into the kitchen, where Bismarck was moving efficiently from electrostove to magnetic worktable. The robot swiveled as Carmichael entered.

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head. "you have a good day, sir?"

theo! I'm hungry!"

"The first days of a diet are always the most difficult, Mr. Carmichael. But your body will adjust to the reduction in food-intake before long."

"I'm sure of that. But what's this business of tinkering with Clyde?"

"The butler insisted on preparing an alcoholic drink for you. I was forced to adjust his programming. From now on, sir, you may indulge in cocktails on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. I beg to be excused from further discussion now, sir. The meal is almost ready."

Poor Clyde! Carmichael thought. *And poor me!* He gnashed his teeth impotently a few times, then gave up and turned away from the glistening, overbearing roboservitor. A light gleamed on the side of the robot's head, indicating that he had shut off his audio circuits and was totally engaged in his task.

DINNER consisted of steak and peas, followed by black coffee. The steak was rare; Carmichael preferred it well done. But Bismarck — the name was beginning to take hold — had had all the latest dietetic theories taped into him, and rare meat it was.

After the robot had cleared the table and tidied up the kitchen, it retired to its storage place in the basement, which gave the Carmichael family a chance to speak openly to each other for the first time that evening.

"Lord!" Ethel snorted. "Sam, I don't object to losing weight, but if we're going to be *tyrannized* in our own home—"

"Mom's right," Joey put in. "It doesn't seem fair for that thing to feed us whatever it pleases. And I didn't like the way it messed around with Clyde's circuits."

Carmichael spread his hands. "I'm not happy about it either. But we have to give it a try. We can always make readjustments in the programming, if it turns out to be necessary."

"But how long are we going to keep this up?" Myra wanted to know. "I had three meals in this house today and I'm *starved!*"

"Me, too," Joey said. He elbowed himself from his chair and looked around. "Bismarck's downstairs. I'm going to get a slice of lemon pie while the coast is clear."

"No!" Carmichael thundered.

"No?"

"There's no sense in my spending three thousand credits on a dietary robot if you're going to cheat, Joey. I forbid you to have any pie."

"But, Dad, I'm hungry! I'm a growing boy! I'm—"

"You're sixteen years old, and if you grow much more, you won't fit inside the house," Carmichael

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snapped, looking up at his six-foot-one son.

"Sam, we can't starve the boy," Ethel protested. "If he wants pie, let him have some. You're carrying this reducing fetish too far."

Carmichael considered that. Perhaps, he thought, I *am* being a little oversevere. And the thought of lemon pie was a tempting one. He was pretty hungry himself.

"All right," he said with feigned reluctance. "I guess a bit of pie won't wreck the plan. In fact, I suppose I'll have some myself. Joey, why don't you—"

"Begging your pardon," a purring voice said behind him. Carmichael jumped half an inch. It was the robot—Bismarck. "It would be most unfortunate if you were to have pie now, Mr. Carmichael. My calculations are *very* precise."

Carmichael saw the angry gleam in his son's eye, but the robot seemed extraordinarily big at that moment, and it happened to stand between him and the kitchen.

He sighed weakly. "Let's forget the lemon pie, Joey."

AFTER two full days of the Bismarckian diet, Carmichael discovered that his inner resources of will power were beginning to crumble. On the third day, he tossed away the printed lunchtime diet and went out irresponsibly with MacDougal and Hennessey for a six-course lunch, complete with cocktails. It seemed to him that he hadn't tasted real food since the robot arrived.

That night, he was able to tolerate the seven-hundred-calorie dinner without any inward grumblings, being still well lined with lunch. But Ethel and Myra and Joey were increasingly irritable. It seemed that the robot had usurped Ethel's job of handling the daily marketing and had stocked in nothing but a huge supply of healthy low-calorie foods. The larder now bulged with wheat germ, protein bread, irrigated salmon, and other hitherto unfamiliar items. Myra had taken up biting her nails; Joey's mood was one of black sullen brooding, and Carmichael knew how that could lead to trouble quickly with a sixteen-year-old.

After the meager dinner, he ordered Bismarck to go to the basement and stay there until summoned.

The robot said, "I must advise you, sir, that I will detect indulgence in any forbidden foods in my absence and adjust for it in the next meals."

"You have my word," Carmichael said, thinking it was indeed queer to have to pledge on your honor to your own robot. He waited until the massive servitor had vanished below; then he turned to Joey and said, "Get the instruction manual, boy."

Joey grinned in understanding.

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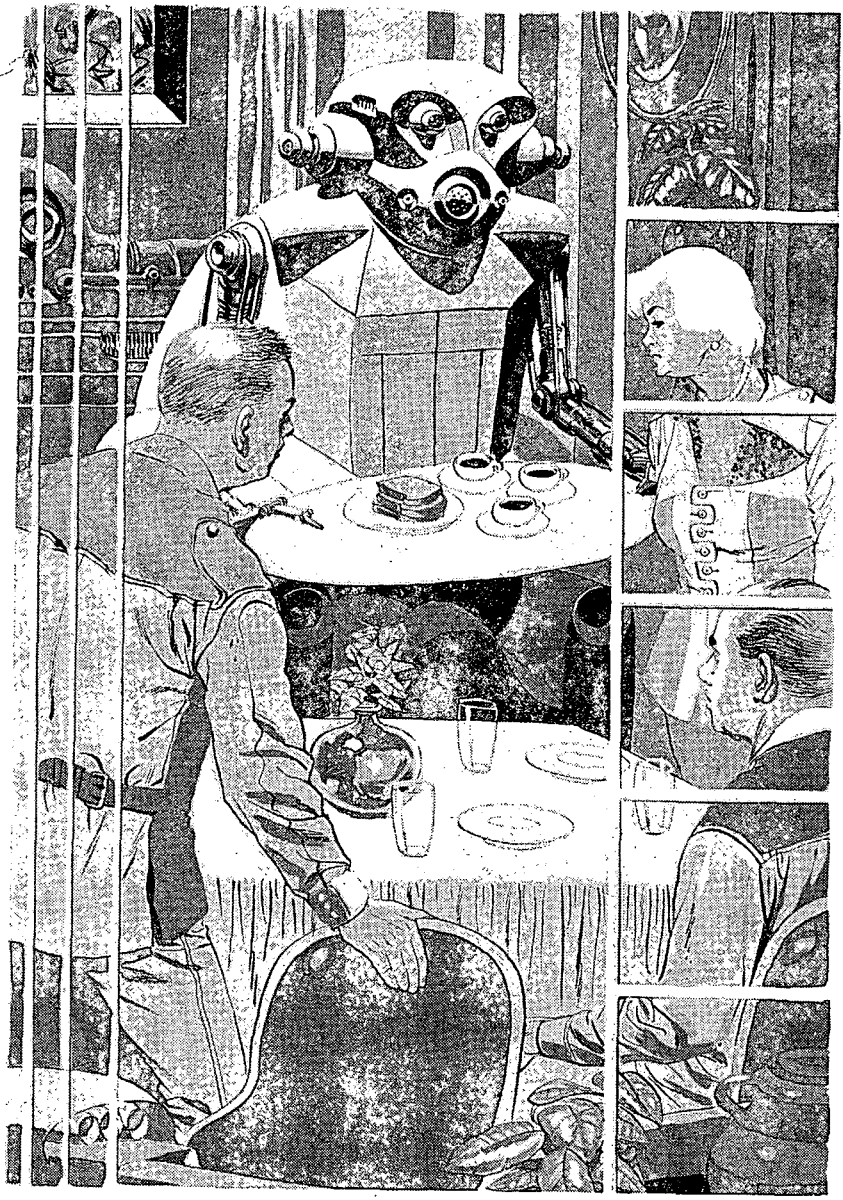

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Ethel said, "Sam, what are you going to do?"

Carmichael patted his shrunken waistline. "I'm going to take a can-opener to that creature and adjust his programming. He's overdoing this diet business. Joey, have you found the instructions on how to reprogram the robot?"

"Page 167. I'll get the tool kit, Dad."

"Right." Carmichael turned to the robutler, who was standing by dumbly, in his usual forward-stooping posture of expectancy. "Clyde, go down below and tell Bismarck we want him right away."

MOMENTS later, the two robots appeared. Carmichael said to the roboservitor, "I'm afraid it's necessary for us to change your program. We've overestimated our capacity for losing weight."

"I beg you to reconsider, sir. Extra weight is harmful to every vital organ in the body. I plead with you to maintain my scheduling unaltered."

"I'd rather cut my own throat. Joey, inactivate him and do your stuff."

Grinning fiercely, the boy stepped forward and pressed the stud that opened the robot's rib-cage. A frightening assortment of gears, cams and translucent cables became visible inside the robot. With a small wrench in one hand and the open instruction book in the other, Joey prepared to make the necessary changes, while Carmichael held his breath and a pall of silence descended on the living room. Even old Clyde leaned forward to have a better view.

Joey muttered, "Lever F2, with the yellow indicia, is to be advanced one notch . . . umm. Now twist Dial B9 to the left, thereby opening the taping compartment and—oops!"

Carmichael heard the clang of a wrench and saw the bright flare of sparks; Joey leaped back, cursing with surprisingly mature skill. Ethel and Myra gasped simultaneously.

"What happened?" four voices —Clyde's coming in last — demanded.

"Dropped the damn wrench," Joey said. "I guess I shorted out something in there."

The robot's eyes were whirling satanically and its voice-box was emitting an awesome twelve-cycle rumble. The great metal creature stood stiffly in the middle of the living room; with brusque gestures of its big hands, it slammed shut the open chest-plates.

"We'd better call Mr. Robinson," Ethel said worriedly. "A short-circuited robot is likely to explode, or worse."

"We should have called Robinson in the first place," Carmichael murmured bitterly. "It's my fault for letting Joey tinker with an ex-

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pensive and delicate mechanism like that. Myra, get me the card Mr. Robinson left."

"Gee, Dad, this is the first time I've ever had anything like that go wrong," Joey insisted. "I didn't know—"

"You're darned right you didn't know." Carmichael took the card from his daughter and started toward the phone. "I hope we can reach him at this hour. If we can't—"

Suddenly Carmichael felt cold fingers prying the card from his hand. He was so startled, he relinquished it without a struggle. He watched as Bismarck efficiently ripped it into little fragments and shoved them into a wall disposal unit.

THE robot said, "There will be no further meddling with my program-tapes." Its voice was deep and strangely harsh.

"What—"

"Mr. Carmichael, today you violated the program I set down for you. My perceptors reveal that you consumed an amount far in excess of your daily lunchtime requirement."

"Sam, what—"

"Quiet, Ethel. Bismarck, I order you to shut yourself off at once."

"My apologies, sir. I cannot serve you if I am shut off."

"I don't *want* you to serve me. You're out of order. I want you to remain still until I can phone the repairman and get him to service you."

Then he remembered the card that had gone into the disposal unit. He felt a faint tremor of apprehension.

"You took Robinson's card and destroyed it."

"Further alteration of my circuits would be detrimental to the Carmichael family," said the robot. "I cannot permit you to summon the repairman."

"Don't get him angry, Dad," Joey warned. "I'll call the police. I'll be back in—"

"You will remain within this house," the robot said. Moving with impressive speed on its oiled treads, it crossed the room, blocking the door, and reached far above its head to activate the impassable privacy field that protected the house. Carmichael watched, aghast, as the inexorable robotic fingers twisted and manipulated the field controls.

"I have now reversed the polarity of the house privacy field," the robot announced. "Since you are obviously not to be trusted to keep to the diet I prescribe, I cannot allow you to leave the premises. You will remain within and continue to obey my beneficial advice."

Calmly, he uprooted the telephone. Next, the windows were

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opaqued and the stud broken off. Finally, the robot seized the instruction book from Joey's numbed hands and shoved it into the disposal unit.

"Breakfast will be served at the usual time," Bismarck said mildly. "For optimum purposes of health, you are all to be asleep by 2300 hours. I shall leave you now, until morning. Good night."

CARMICHAEL did not sleep well that night, nor did he eat well the next day. He awoke late, for one thing — well past nine. He discovered that someone, obviously Bismarck, had neatly canceled out the impulses from the house-brain that woke him at seven each morning.

The breakfast menu was toast and black coffee. Carmichael ate disgruntedly, not speaking, indicating by brusque scowls that he did not want to be spoken to. After the miserable meal had been cleared away, he surreptitiously tiptoed to the front door in his dressing-gown and darted a hand toward the handle.

The door refused to budge. He pushed until sweat dribbled down his face. He heard Ethel whisper warningly, "*Sam—*" and a moment later cool metallic fingers gently disengaged him from the door.

Bismarck said, "I beg your pardon, sir. The door will not open. I explained this last night."

Carmichael gazed sourly at the gimmicked control-box of the privacy field. The robot had them utterly hemmed in. The reversed privacy field made it impossible for them to leave the house; it cast a sphere of force around the entire detached dwelling. In theory, the field could be penetrated from outside, but nobody was likely to come calling without an invitation. Not here in Westley. It wasn't one of those neighborly subdivisions where everybody knew everybody else. Carmichael had picked it for that reason.

"Damn you," he growled, "you can't hold us *prisoners* in here!"

"My intent is only to help you," said the robot, in a mechanical yet dedicated voice. "My function is to supervise your diet. Since you will not obey willingly, obedience must be enforced — for your own good."

Carmichael scowled and walked away. The worst part of it was that the roboservitor sounded so *sincere!*

Trapped. The phone connection was severed. The windows were darkened. Somehow, Joey's attempt at repairs had resulted in a short-circuit of the robot's obedience filters, and had also exaggeratedly stimulated its sense of function. Now Bismarck was determined to make them lose weight if it had to kill them to do so.

And that seemed very likely.

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BLOCKADED, the Carmichael family met in a huddled little group to whisper plans for a counterattack. Clyde stood watch, but the robutler seemed to be in a state of general shock since the demonstration of the servitor-robot's independent capacity for action, and Carmichael now regarded him as undependable.

"He's got the kitchen walled off with some kind of electronic-based force-web," Joey said. "He must have built it during the night. I tried to sneak in and scrounge some food, and got nothing but a flat nose for trying."

"I know," Carmichael said sadly. "He built the same sort of doohickey around the bar. Three hundred credits of good booze in there and I can't even grab the handle!"

"This is no time to worry about drinking," Ethel said morosely. "We'll be skeletons any day."

"It isn't *that* bad, Mom!" Joey said.

"Yes, it is!" cried Myra. "I've lost five pounds in four days!"

"Is that so terrible?"

"I'm wasting away," she sobbed. "My figure — it's vanishing! And—"

"Quiet," Carmichael whispered. "Bismarck's coming!"

The robot emerged from the kitchen, passing through the force-barrier as if it had been a cobweb. It seemed to have effect on humans only, Carmichael thought. "Lunch will be served in eight minutes," it said obsequiously, and returned to its lair.

Carmichael glanced at his watch. The time was 1230 hours. "Probably down at the office they're wondering where I am," he said. "I haven't missed a day's work in years."

"They won't care," Ethel said. "An executive isn't required to account for every day off he takes, you know."

"But they'll worry after three or four days, won't they?" Myra asked. "Maybe they'll try to phone — or even send a rescue mission!"

From the kitchen, Bismarck said coldly, "There will be no danger of that. While you slept this morning, I notified your place of employment that you were resigning."

Carmichael gasped. Then, recovering, he said: "You're lying! The phone's cut off—and you never would have risked leaving the house, even if we *were* asleep!"

"I communicated with them via a microwave generator I constructed with the aid of your son's reference books last night," Bismarck replied. "Clyde reluctantly supplied me with the number. I also phoned your bank and instructed them to handle for you all such matters as tax payments, investment decisions, etc. To forestall difficulties, let me add that a force-web will prevent access on your part to the electronic equipment in the basement. I will be

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able to conduct such communication with the outside world as will be necessary for your welfare, Mr. Carmichael. You need have no worries on that score."

"No," Carmichael echoed hollowly. "No worries."

HE turned to Joey. "We've got to get out of here. Are you sure there's no way of disconnecting the privacy field?"

"He's got one of his force-fields rigged around the control-box. I can't even get near the thing."

"If only we had an iceman, or an oilman, the way the oldtime houses did," Ethel said bitterly. "He'd show up and come inside and probably he'd know how to shut the field off. But not *here*. Oh, no. We've got a shiny chrome-plated cryostat in the basement that dishes out lots of liquid helium to run the fancy cryotronic supercooled power plant that gives us heat and light, and we have enough food in the freezer to last for at least a decade or two, and so we can live like this for years, a neat little self-contained island in the middle of civilization, with nobody bothering us, nobody wondering about us, and Sam Carmichael's pet robot to feed us whenever and as little as it pleases—"

There was a cutting edge to her voice that was dangerously close to hysteria.

"Ethel, please," said Carmichael.

"Please what? Please keep quiet? Please stay calm? Sam, we're *prisoners* in here!"

"I know. You don't have to raise your voice."

"Maybe if I do, someone will hear us and come get us out," she replied more coolly.

"It's four hundred feet to the next home, dear. And in the seven years we've lived here, we've had about two visits from our neighbors. We paid a stiff price for seclusion and now we're paying a stiffer one. But please keep under control, Ethel."

"Don't worry, Mom. I'll figure a way out of this," Joey said reassuringly.

In one corner of the living room, Myra was sobbing quietly to herself, blotching her makeup. Carmichael felt a faintly claustrophobic quiver. The house was big, three levels and twelve rooms, but even so he could get tired of it very quickly.

"Luncheon is served," the robot-servitor announced in booming tones.

And tired of lettuce-and-tomato lunches, too, Carmichael added silently, as he shepherded his family toward the dining room for their meager midday meal.

"YOU have to do *something* about this, Sam," Ethel Carmichael said on the third day of their imprisonment.

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He glared at her. "Have to, eh? And just what am I supposed to do?"

"Daddy, don't get excited," Myra said.

He whirled on her. "Don't tell me what I should or shouldn't do!"

"She can't help it, dear. We're all a little overwrought. After all, cooped up here—"

"I know. Like lambs in a pen," he finished acidly. "Except that we're not being fattened for slaughter. We're — we're being *thinned*, and for our own alleged good!"

Carmichael subsided gloomily. Toast-and-black-coffee, lettuce-and-tomato, rare-steak-and-peas. Bismarck's channels seemed to have frozen permanently at that daily menu.

But what could he do?

Contact with the outside world was impossible. The robot had erected a bastion in the basement from which he conducted such little business with the world as the Carmichael family had. Generally, they were self-sufficient. And Bismarck's force-fields insured the impossibility of any attempts to disconnect the outer sheath, break into the basement, or even get at the food supply or the liquor. It was all very neat, and the four of them were fast approaching a state of starvation.

"Sam?"

He lifted his head wearily. "What is it, Ethel?"

"Myra had an idea before. Tell him, Myra."

"Oh, it would never work," Myra said demurely.

"Tell him!"

"Well — Dad, you *could* try to turn Bismarck off."

"Huh?" Carmichael grunted.

"I mean if you or Joey could distract him somehow, then Joey or you could open him up again and—"

"No," Carmichael snapped. "That thing's seven feet tall and weighs three hundred pounds. If you think *I'm* going to wrestle with it—"

"We could let Clyde try," Ethel suggested.

Carmichael shook his head vehemently. "The carnage would be frightful."

Joey said, "Dad, it may be our only hope."

"You too? Carmichael asked.

HE took a deep breath. He felt himself speared by two deadly feminine glances, and he knew there was no hope but to try it. Resignedly, he pushed himself to his feet and said, "Okay. Clyde, go call Bismarck. Joey, I'll try to hang onto his arms while you open up his chest. Yank anything you can."

"Be careful," Ethel warned. "If there's an explosion—"

"If there's an explosion, we're all free," Carmichael said testily. He turned to see the broad figure

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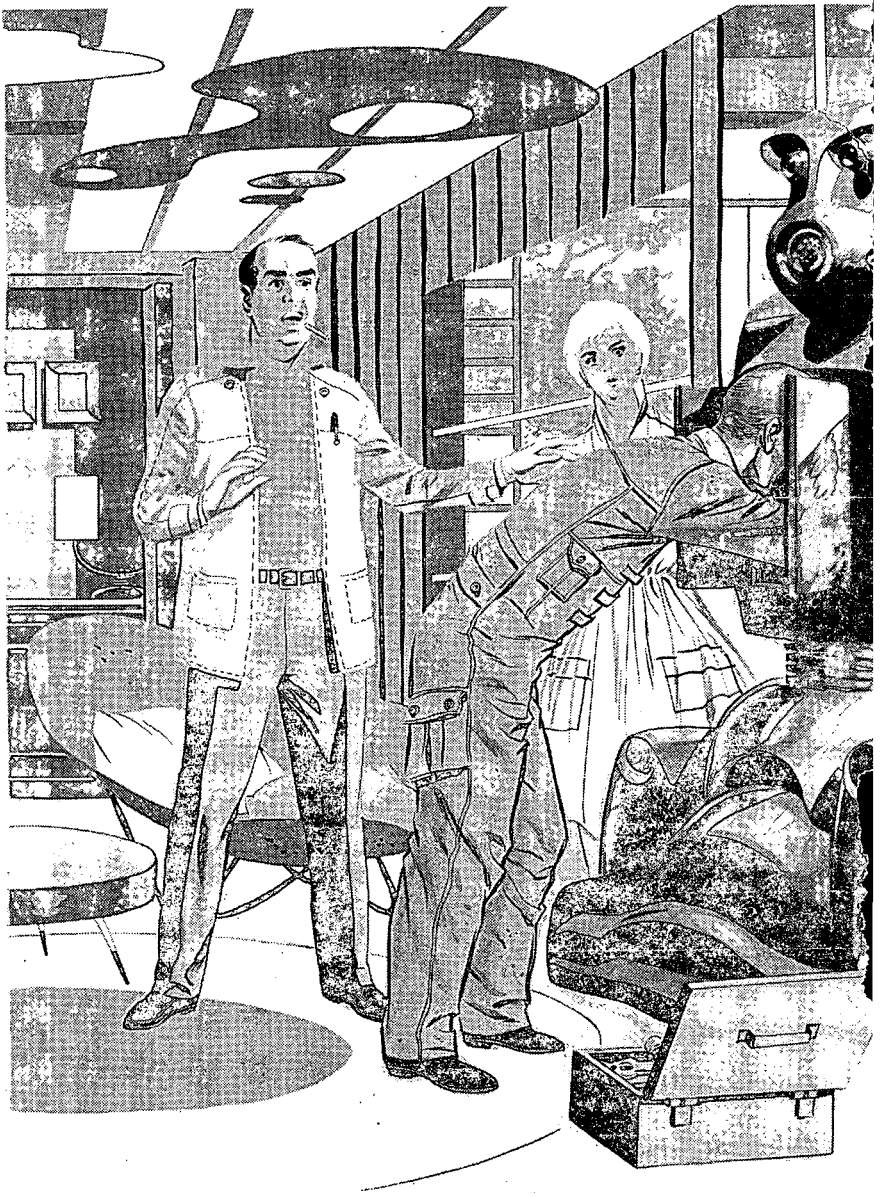

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of the roboservitor standing at the entrance to the living room.

"May I be of service, sir?"

"You may," Carmichael said. "We're having a little debate here and we want your evidence. It's a matter of defannising the poozlestan and — *Joey, open him up!*"

Carmichael grabbed for the robot's arms, trying to hold them without getting hurled across the room, while his son clawed frantically at the stud that opened the robot's innards. Carmichael anticipated immediate destruction — but, to his surprise, he found himself slipping as he tried to grasp the thick arms.

"Dad, it's no use. I — he —"

Carmichael found himself abruptly four feet off the ground. He heard Ethel and Myra scream and Clyde's "*Do* be careful, sir."

Bismarck was carrying them across the room, gently, cradling him in one giant arm and Joey in the other. It set them down on the couch and stood back.

"Such an attempt is highly dangerous," Bismarck said reprovingly. "It puts me in danger of harming you physically. Please avoid any such acts in the future."

Carmichael stared broodingly at his son. "Did you have the same trouble I did?"

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Joey nodded. "I couldn't get within an inch of his skin. It stands to reason, though. He's built one of those damned force-screens around *himself*, too!"

Carmichael groaned. He did not look at his wife and his children. Physical attack on Bismarck was now out of the question. He began to feel as if he had been condemned to life imprisonment — and that his stay in durance vile would not be extremely prolonged.

IN the upstairs bathroom, six days after the beginning of the blockade, Sam Carmichael stared at his haggard fleshless face in the mirror before wearily climbing on the scale.

He weighed 180.

He had lost twelve pounds in less than two weeks. He was fast becoming a quivering wreck.

A thought occurred to him as he stared at the wavering needle on the scale, and sudden elation [illegible]ver him. He dashed downstairs. Ethel was doggedly crocheting in the living room; Joey and Myra were playing cards grimly, desperately now, after six solid days of gin rummy and honeymoon bridge.

"Where's that robot?" Carmichael roared. "Come out here!"

"In the kitchen," Ethel said tonelessly.

"Bismarck! Bismarck!" Carmichael roared. "Come out here!"

The robot appeared. "How may I serve you, sir?"

"Damn you, scan me with your super-power receptors and tell me how much I weigh!"

After a pause, the robot said gravely, "One hundred seventy-nine pounds eleven ounces, Mr. Carmichael."

"Yes! Yes! And the original program I had taped into you was supposed to reduce me from 192 to 180," Carmichael crowed triumphantly. "So I'm finished with you, as long as I don't gain any more weight. And so are the rest of us, I'll bet. Ethel! Myra! Joey! Upstairs and weigh yourselves!"

But the robot regarded him with a doleful glare and said, "Sir, I find no record within me of any limitation on your reduction of weight."

"What?"

"I have checked my tapes fully. I have a record of an order causing weight reduction, but that tape does not appear to specify a *terminus ad quem.*"

Carmichael exhaled and took three staggering steps backward. His legs wobbled; he felt Joey supporting him. He mumbled, "But I thought — I'm sure we did — I *know* we instructed you—"

Hunger gnawed at his flesh. Joey said softly, "Dad, probably that part of his tape was erased when he short-circuited."

"Oh," Carmichael said numbly.

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HE tottered into the living room and collapsed heavily in what had once been his favorite armchair. It wasn't any more. The entire house had become odious to him. He longed to see the sunlight again, to see trees and grass, even to see that excrescence of an ultra-modern house that the left-hand neighbors had erected.

But now that would be impossible. He had hoped, for a few minutes at least, that the robot would release them from dietary bondage when the original goal was shown to be accomplished. Evidently that was to be denied him. He giggled, then began to laugh.

"What's so funny, dear?" Ethel asked. She had lost her earlier tendencies to hysteria, and after long days of complex crocheting now regarded the Universe with quiet resignation.

"Funny? The fact that I weigh 180 now. I'm lean, trim, fit as a fiddle. Next month I'll weigh 170. Then 160. Then finally about 88 pounds or so. We'll all shrivel up. Bismarck will starve us to death."

"Don't worry, Dad. We're going to get out of this."

Somehow Joey's brash boyish confidence sounded forced now. Carmichael shook his head. "We won't. We'll never get out. And Bismarck's going to reduce us *ad infinitem*. He's got no *terminus ad quem!*"

"What's he saying?" Myra asked.

"It's Latin," Joey explained. "But listen, Dad—I have an idea that I think will work." He lowered his voice. "I'm going to try to adjust Clyde, see? If I can get a sort of multiphase vibrating effect in his neural pathway, maybe I can slip him through the reversed privacy field. He can go get help, find someone who can shut the field off. There's an article on multiphase generators in last month's *Popular Electromagnetics* and it's in my room upstairs. I —"

His voice died away. Carmichael, who had been listening with the air of a condemned man hearing his reprieve, said impatiently, "Well? Go on. Tell me more."

"Didn't you hear that, Dad?"

"Hear what?"

"The front door. I thought I heard it open just now."

"We're all cracking up," Carmichael said dully. He cursed the salesman at Marhew, he cursed the inventor of cryotronic robots, he cursed the day he had first felt ashamed of good old Jemima and resolved to replace her with a new model.

"I hope I'm not intruding, Mr. Carmichael," a new voice said apologetically.

Carmichael blinked and looked up. A wiry, ruddy-cheeked figure in a heavy pea-jacket had material-

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ized in the middle of the living room. He was clutching a green metal toolbox in one gloved hand. He was Robinson, the robot repairman.

CARMICHAEL asked hoarsely, "How did *you* get in?"

"Through the front door. I could see a light on inside, but nobody answered the doorbell when I rang, so I stepped in. Your doorbell's out of order. I thought I'd tell you. I know it's rude—"

"Don't apologize," Carmichael muttered. "We're delighted to see you."

"I was in the neighborhood, you see, and I figured I'd drop in and see how things were working out with your new robot," Robinson said.

Carmichael told him crisply and precisely and quickly. "So we've been prisoners in here for six days," he finished. "And your robot is gradually starving us to death. We can't hold out much longer."

The smile abruptly left Robinson's cheery face. "I *thought* you all looked rather unhealthy. Oh, damn, now there'll be an investigation and all kinds of trouble. But at least I can end your imprisonment."

He opened his toolbox and selected a tubular instrument eight inches long, with a glass bulb at one end and a trigger attachment at the other. "Force-field damper," he explained. He pointed it at the control-box of the privacy field and nodded in satisfaction. "There. Great little gadget. That neutralizes the effects of what the robot did and you're no longer blockaded. And now, if you'll produce the robot—"

Carmichael sent Clyde off to get Bismarck. The robutler returned a few moments later, followed by the looming roboservitor. Robinson grinned gaily, pointed the neutralizer at Bismarck and squeezed. The robot froze in mid-glide, emitting a brief squeak.

"There. That should immobilize him. Let's have a look in that chassis now."

The repairman quickly opened Bismarck's chest and, producing a pocket flash, peered around in the complex interior of the servomechanism, making occasional clucking inaudible comments.

OVERWHELMED with relief, Carmichael shakily made his way to a seat. Free! Free at last! His mouth watered at the thought of the meals he was going to have in the next few days. Potatoes and martinis and warm buttered rolls and all the other forbidden foods!

"Fascinating," Robinson said, half to himself. "The obedience filters are completely shorted out, and the purpose-nodes were somehow soldered together by the momentary high-voltage arc. I've

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never seen anything quite like this, you know."

"Neither had we," Carmichael said hollowly.

"Really, though — this is an utterly new breakthrough in robotic science! If we can reproduce this effect, it means we can build self-willed robots — and think of what *that* means to science!"

"We know already," Ethel said.

"I'd love to watch what happens when the power source is operating," Robinson went on. "For instance, is that feedback loop really negative or—"

"No!" five voices shrieked at once — with Clyde, as usual, coming in last.

IT was too late. The entire event had taken no more than a tenth of a second. Robinson had squeezed his neutralizer trigger again, activating Bismarck—and in one quick swoop the roboservitor seized neutralizer and toolbox from the stunned repairman, activated the privacy field once again, and exultantly crushed the fragile neutralizer between two mighty fingers.

Robinson stammered, "But — but —"

"This attempt at interfering with the well-being of the Carmichael family was ill-advised," Bismarck said severely. He peered into the toolbox, found a second neutralizer and neatly reduced it to junk. He clanged shut his chest-plates.

Robinson turned and streaked for the door, forgetting the reactivated privacy field. He bounced back hard, spinning wildly around. Carmichael rose from his seat just in time to catch him.

There was a panicky, trapped look on the repairman's face. Carmichael was no longer able to share the emotion; inwardly he was numb, totally resigned, not minded for further struggle.

"He—he moved so *fast!*" Robinson burst out.

"He did indeed," Carmichael said tranquilly. He patted his hollow stomach and sighed gently. "Luckily, we have an unoccupied guest bedroom for you, Mr. Robinson. Welcome to our happy little home. I hope you like toast and black coffee for breakfast."

— ROBERT SILVERBERG

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(Continued from page 4)
been intended for some other planet."

John Davenport's "Slurvian Self-Taught" indicates that there is an unknown nationality without a country, indentifiable of course by language, and gives these examples:

bean, n. A living creature, as in *human bean.*

cactus, n. pl. The people in a play or story.

lore, n. The more desirable of the two berths in a Pullman.

myrrh, n. A looking glass.

plight, adj. Courteous.

Davenport notes that these and other instances make good English words, and concludes there are "pure" Slurvians, as opposed to those who, in florist shops, buy flars, or, traveling abroad, visit farn (or forn) countries. Maybe, but this deduction should be checked against those in the above-mentioned "Look Now."

"I Say It's False!" by Parke Cummings tells how to beat all true and false quizzes — simply say "False!" to every question:

Q. Dogs cannot climb trees. True or false?

A. False! All dogs are perfectly capable of climbing trees. The reason they do not do so is because of an element in the bark of trees (sennic acid) which is injurious to their feet. If it were not for that, as tests with trees from which that acid has been removed prove, dogs would climb trees just as eagerly as cats.

Q. It is colder in winter than in summer. True or false?

A. Not on your tintype! The common custom of wearing heavy clothing in wintertime has caused this popular misconception. Heavy clothing impedes the circulation and hence leads to the erroneous belief that one is "cold" . . .

Q. Vienna is the capital of Austria. True or false?

A. Oh, let's not go into *that* again.

"H. J. Talking" by R. G. G. Price is the autobiography of a scientist with:

A wife who discourages him in his work (psychological physics) and insists the Seven Wonders of the World are chosen annually by the Swedes.

A tenant, also a scientist (solar biology).

An indeterminate number of children, one of whom is considered odd because he was raised with three owls in an experiment.

A Financial Flair worth study — it includes a plan that would allow him to go tax-free if he brings in ten new taxpayers.

No money in my pocket if you get *The Family Book of Humor;* just that if you do, don't think of it as losing $3.95 but rather as gaining 700 fun-filled pages.

— H. L. GOLD

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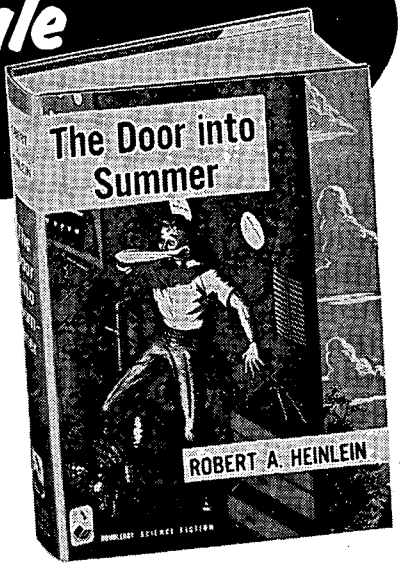

—*Continued from Back Cover*

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